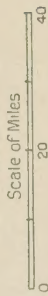


SCOTLAND



Orkney Is

Pentland Firth
Duncansby Hd

John o' Groats Ho

L. Watten

Tongue

C. Wrath

NEOLDALE FERRY

Dunness

The Murch

Stornoway

I. Shun

Rosehall

Strathgyle

Bonar Bridge

Taino

Cromarty

Dingwall

Beaulieu

More Ness

Loch Ness

Kingussie

Corrievarrick

1892

Loch

FT Augustus

Glenn

L. Arkalg

L. Eul

FT

FT

FT

Ord of Caithness

Helmsdale

Brora

Donnoch

Elgin

Cromarty

Nairn

Rothes

Seel

Grantown

Aviemore

Tomintoul

Dee

Balmoral

Loch

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Loch

Loch

Loch

Loch

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Loch

Loch

Fraserburgh

Peterhead

Banff

Huntly

Don

Dee

Stonehaven

Dunnottar Castle

Stonehaven

ABERDEEN

MOUNTAINS

Devils

Devils

Dalwhinnie

Dalwhinnie

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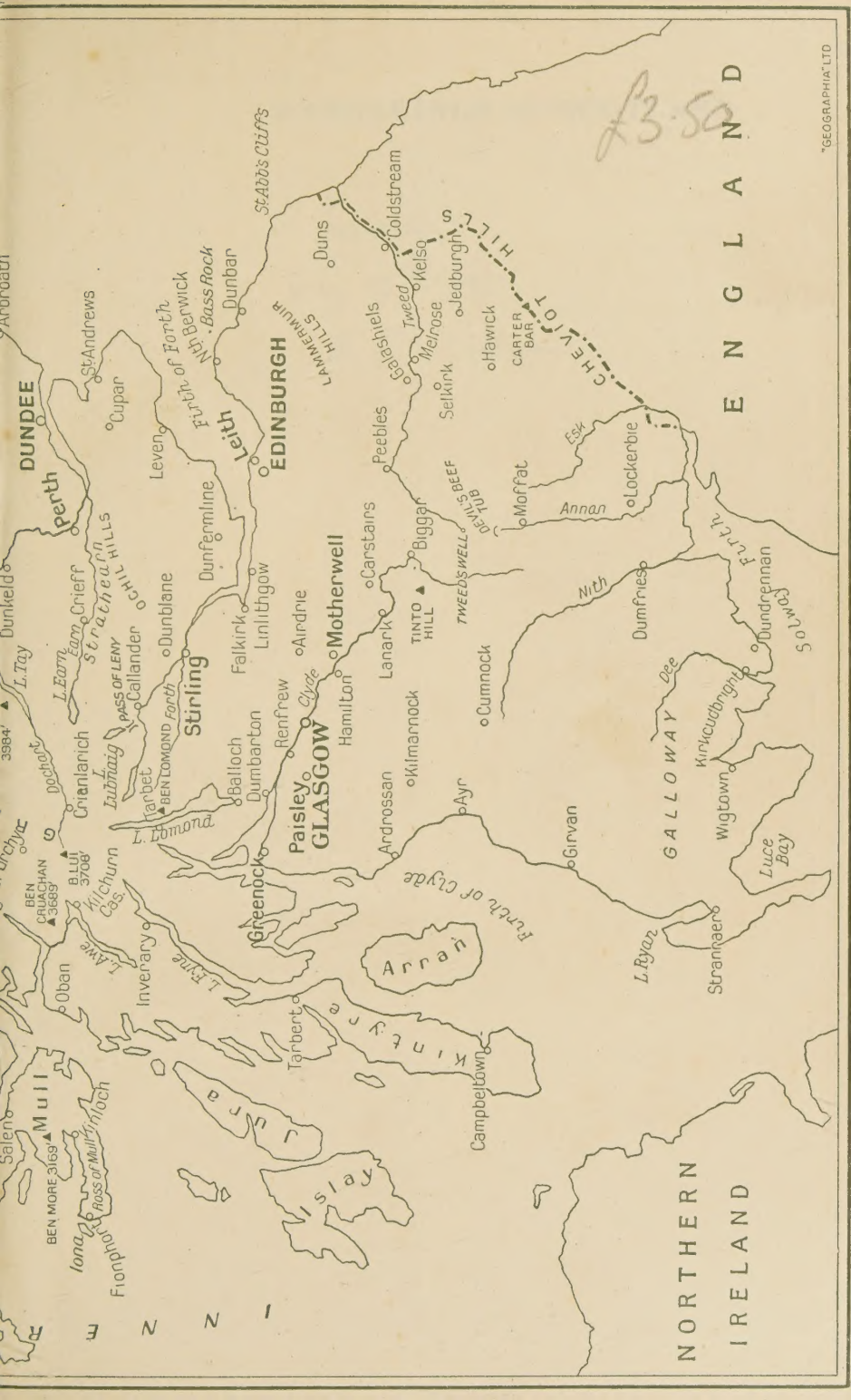
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Inverness



ENGLAND

NORTHERN IRELAND

WANDERINGS IN SCOTLAND


H. Custace.

July 25th. 1951.

at St. William.

William T. Palmer has also written

ODD CORNERS IN ENGLISH LAKELAND
MORE ODD CORNERS IN ENGLISH LAKELAND
ODD CORNERS IN NORTH WALES
MORE ODD CORNERS IN NORTH WALES
ODD CORNERS IN THE YORKSHIRE DALES
ODD CORNERS IN DERBYSHIRE
NATURE'S CALENDAR
WANDERINGS IN LAKELAND
WANDERINGS IN SURREY



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[Photo by Douglas Scott]

Ben Nevis: North-East Buttress showing the 2000 ft. wall

WANDERINGS IN SCOTLAND

WILLIAM T. PALMER

F.R.G.S., M.B.O.U., F.S.A.Scot.

Thirty-Three Illustrations and Map

SKEFFINGTON AND SON LTD

Founded 1858

Hutchinson House, W.I

NEW YORK ♦ MELBOURNE ♦ SYDNEY ♦ CAPE TOWN

DEDICATED TO MY DAUGHTER

JEAN

*Printed in Great Britain
by The Anchor Press, Ltd.,
Tiptree, Essex*

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DEFIANCE

THIS book, *Wanderings in Scotland* (like its predecessor, *Wanderings in Lakeland*), covers the outdoor experiences of half a century, and is submitted to readers in a spirit of defiance. It is largely made up of chapters written during particular trips north of the Border for editors of various papers in Scotland, Northern England and London. At times the sequence was so rapid that I was chaffed for my permanent Scottish address. It was my practice to make duplicates of work done in the open, and the finding of a box of these MSS., after many years, make the volume possible.

Every day in the Scottish wilderness—with the journey on foot, by rail, steamer, cycle, and later by motor-car—had to provide its quota of copy varied and lively enough for editorial acceptance. And it jolly well did. Once the ground was reached, weather, hour and season had to be ignored, and incidents (maybe mild to the reader but sometimes risky to the writer) provoked. There was often quite sufficient of sensation as well as of beauty.

Storm—quite apart from snowfall—had to be defied, either on the ridges or the wild paths and passes; the game might become uncomfortable when feet and body tired and boots gave out; the soaking of clothing was a trifle. The Night Side of the peaks and glens may seem rather prominent. In calm summer, relief and contrast had to be found for the statuesque days, and Editors accepted these sketches—bless them! My rock climbing in Scotland was limited by the fact that I was never able to bring together a regular party or find a single experienced comrade.

Time came when my Scottish journeys were more often motored than done by train, and for this reason the book is dedicated to the daughter who drove the car along some awful tracks by glen and shore. I had added to the equipment tents and proper camping outfit for the family.

CHAPTER

WANDERER SCOTLAND FROM BORDER TO PENTLAND FIRTH

St. Andrew's Night—Solway Fords—Carter Bar—Lammermuirs—Covenanter Land—Devil's Beef Tub—Drinking at River Sources—Bird Cliffs of St. Abb's—Western Marches: the Soldiers' Road—Where Queen Mary Embarked—Finest Coastal Road?—Tinto Hill—Stirlingshire Hills—Lochleven Trout—Strathearn—Perth as Gateway—Killiecrankie—Tey Runs Brown—Arbroath and Mearns—Stow, the Fisher Lad—Regalia's Adventure—Gude Scots Drink—Place of Otters—Moray Firth Coast—Dawn on the Cairngorm—Historic Inverness—Tartan—Glorious Glens—Old Red Sandstone—Peaks of Wester Ross—Montrose's Last Campaign—Arctic Poaching—Northernmost Bens—Camps in Uttermost Scotland—Hebridean Fisherfolk—Peat Charcoal—Oratories Among the Rocks—Pipe Music—Mackay Pipers—Gaelic Fiddlers—Evenings in Lochaber—Across Ben More of Mull—Tenting in Historic Iona—Further South to Kintyre.

THIS volume was written, at intervals of many years, for newspapers, magazines and reviews published in Scotland, North England and London. Much of the MSS. was found in a box, and I have now run together some chapters on outdoor life and sport. You may take it as a care-free, happy wandering across the bens and along the glens, through timber and deer forests, across grouse and heather moors, by the tideway skerries, and along shore if you can. Much of it was hard graft for me; editorial wishes had to be strictly observed, and always there was the effort to keep a keen outlook for the unusual. Long marches, steep climbs in snow and ice can hold romance and glamour; I cycled to village festivals and tramped to discover amusing characters. All my life outdoor sports and Nature has been as fascinating as the climbing of peaks, passes, glen roads and wastes.

Scotland is a country to be entered on foot by ancient bridge or by still more ancient ford of the Border streams. To rush northward by the coastal railways is tempting, but such a traveller misses a lot. I wonder if the same should apply to the passengers by express and touring buses, which work to a time schedule quite outside control. The motorist misses much less. The road is far more intimate than the track of steel, and the spirit, atmosphere and delight can be enjoyed at every halt. The supreme test of Scotland is its contrast with the land to the southward, and at a score places you came up through Cumberland or Northumberland, finding and noting the points of divergence in character and scenery, the methods of work and house construction. I have passed through the Cheviots from Keilder on the North Tyne to Jedburgh on a wild November day when the full gale buffeted and screamed, and mist and rain dimmed the moorland. Deep bogs lurk between spits of sound grass, and on the north side the drainage system is a peril to anyone unwary. In addition, this is limestone country, and here and there deep "sinks"

swallow up rattling streams. In snow-time these sudden gulfs must be a peril indeed—no wonder the old Border was wont to proclaim peace from Michaelmas to the following Easter. In such quarters winter warfare was certainly not worth the loss of a whole expedition floundering in the snow drifts and among the bottomless hags. The Keilder right of way divides into the path over the ridge to Jed Head, where the descent had many a glimpse through the broken storm clouds over truly caller and open-lying “forest” country. Or, farther east, toward the Black Water. In either case the end of the day’s journey is at Jedburgh, some eight or ten miles of hard road away from the fell farms. In November it is usual to be benighted on this stretch, but what does it matter so long as the wanderer is off the open fellside by nightfall?

ST. ANDREW’S NIGHT

The last night of November is dedicated to the memory of St. Andrew in Border villages from Tweed to Tyne, from Nith to Eden. Indeed, the ghost of the saint, on his name-night, used to patrol our brawling streams and ponder over the deep pools and rattling shallows, but the art of spearing salmon on the spawning redds is no more. The Border shepherd prefers his fish less slinky. As St. Andrew’s afternoon waned, I picked my way down the grass slope between the two countries, listening to the year-round carols of dippers and wrens where the water rolls brown and hoarse. I had heard the sharp partridge-wing rattle of snow-bunting, and the day was rapidly worsening. In storm this high bar or pass may well raise the comment: “Hoot, mon, hoot; the vary de’il himsel’ wanda bide there half an ’oor unless he was tethered”. Therefore let us fare northward to Scotland and the long stone houses of the gipsies and of the old folk.

The festival of St. Andrew is less merry than Hallowe’en (October 31), because it is less youthful; it is less riotous than Hogmanay because it is a home gathering rather than a convivial outburst. In this nook of Northern Cheviot it is the time of song and story, of old reminiscences and legend. St. Andrew’s night has its quips: “Always lend a horse to a lover”. The Border folks know the danger of putting pledges into black and white. It was on St. Andrew’s eve that I first (and only once) heard the old song of Douglas and Percy crooned. This village was well served at Otterburn, it was foremost in the riot at Reedsmyre. It was a land as fierce as that to the south where the folk were conquered:

Till the Cruel Sike wi’ Scottish blode rins rede
Thoo maun na sowe corn by Tyneside.

Of the ancient song Sir Philip Sidney wrote in his *Defense of Poesy*: “I never heard the old song of Percy and Douglas that I found not my heart moved more than with a trumpet.” Those ancient tales! How well I remember! There are still memories of the old minstrel tunes. I have heard the resounding Border chorus of “Johnny Cope”, the wail of a

Reedsmyre lament; I have listened to stories of broken towers and exiled folk, of secret treasures guarded by powerful dwarfs, of money and jewels which sinks into deep silent loughs when the adventurer comes near enough to grip it with both hands. I have heard too of the old dame of the high glen who, when she came to the sea, asked anxiously: "Ha'e we to ford yon watter?" But the Border changes. The old stories are seldom told; the pity of life strikes deeply; St. Andrew's day on both sides of Cheviot is but "the end of an auld sang".

Equally, if not more attractive, is an entry into Scotland from Bewcastle, that wild moorland parish larger than many counties which stretches from Hadrian's Wall up to the Liddel fords and bridges. Some slopes are planted with conifers, but Bewcastle remains the loneliest place of the English North, a dozen miles from the nearest railway station, far from the nearest motor road which winds beneath the upper ledge of the Pennine plateau. The silence here is eloquent of great days that are gone. This was a stronghold of most determined cattle reivers in history, more than a Debateable Land in which Armstrongs and Elliots, Bells and Grahams ravaged each other's goods or raided through each other's zones into Scotland or England with equal indifference.

Sought the beeves to make them broth
In England and Scotland both.

The ford at Kershopefoot was one of the secret passages of Bewcastle Waste which had to be guarded by both countries, but many a foray slipped through without the alarm being raised. So wicked was the Bewcastle reputation that we are told that Newcastle burgesses of old banded themselves together not to take apprentices from this evil parish. It was a place where the Border bloodhounds were for three hundred years rarely out of commission in tracking murderers, thieves, or other criminals, or the more gentlemanly reivers to whom only cattle was an object.

SOLWAY FORDS

There are old fords on the Solway where in the two centuries before railways the cattle from Scotland passed quietly enough to English markets, their greatest danger being the rising tide between Bowness and Annan. In reiver times they were often enough the lines of attack and escape, just as something over a century ago they passed many a smuggler's load of Hollands gin or French brandy to the Cumbrian receivers. The old coach roads into Scotland came together at Gretna Green, the western and shorter one cutting the Sark a mile or so to the south of Metal Bridge, the eastern coming by Longtown bridge. The former was the route for runaway bridal couples, more direct but not always passable when the flood was out on the Solway mosses.

In these days the terror of the marshes has departed. Where formerly

lay morass is now agricultural tracts of fair quality, suited to water-loving crops, and liable to winter inundations. The influence of the great Sir Richard Graham (1792-1861) of Netherby caused his own tenants to drain their holdings and to reclaim moss land, and his example was followed on the great farming estates within many a mile. Netherby is the very eye of the English Border, watching still a ford of the Esk by which old armies passed to war. So long as there was a Graham (or Graeme) in Netherby, the Border was held safe except for attack in force. Outside Longtown is another of the typical fords by which cattle and wild men could pass from one land to the next. The little village commands the long thin shallow today. Canonbie and Langholm are typical Scottish communities and present a contrast to the southern villages only a few miles away. The Lowland Scots is a far different tongue to that of Border Cumberland, showing that for centuries there has been partition between the two. The line of the Liddel is now the border, a smaller stream with a possibility of more fords than the mightier Esk. Here in the old time it was against the law of both countries to put any obstacle in the water, to render an acknowledged ford impassable, or to open a new route across the stream.

Through the gap of Deadwater a railway threads its way from North Tyne to the Liddel—a wandering piece of transport with few trains and merely local passenger traffic across the border. Down in Northumberland, however, the line did serve the Plashetts coal mines. Border Scotland is not rich in minerals or in work other than forestry, agriculture and wool-farming. East of Carter Fell the road from the Rede to the Jed makes a fine entrance into Scotland, rising at the Bar to 1250 feet and passing nearly 30 miles between the inn at Otterburn and the next at Jedburgh far over the Border.

CARTER BAR

As drove road, the way over Carter Bar has been memorable, bringing horses, cattle and sheep to the busy marts at Hexham and Newcastle. The great mail-coaches from Edinburgh to Newcastle and London also made triumphant progress here. Of course, there were many more inns and horse-changing places every few miles along the busy road. The mail traversed the 240 miles or so between London and Edinburgh in 24 hours at the rate of 10 miles per hour all the way. Today the road by Catcleugh is a great trunk route. As to the rest of Cheviot, the crossings are few and unimportant. There was the Roman "Dere Street" from the Tyne to the Tweed, which I understand is now to be regarded as a memory to wanderers. I am glad that I traversed the crossing before the artillery began to boom and crash over the grass slopes. Up the Coquet valley a path strikes across the hills to the Tweed. In addition, Alwinton makes a call across the Cheviots to Hownam, but is a pretty long trounce. Beyond Cheviot itself the country is laced with lanes and roads and paths, and there is wandering through ancient villages through the country of Flodden

and the Till, of Wark and Chillingham, of Etal and Wooler. Here in the old time war was a commonplace, and it is impossible to walk a mile without meeting some ruin or ancient keep belonging to one name or other. Yet there were fewer of the broken folks than on the western side of the Borders. With the Percies based on Alnwick there could be no relaxing of vigilance on either side of the great River Tweed. Their call had to be obeyed.

South-Eastern Scotland, or the Merse of Berwickshire, is primarily the land of Sir Walter Scott, of the Tweed, of Border pele towers, of raids, romances and dastardly crimes. The lover of ancient history needs no guiding, nor does the angler whose days after salmon and trout take him up from the brackish estuary pools at Berwick into the heart of the hills, up the Whitadder into the Lammermuirs, up Teviot and Yarrow into the forest of Jedburgh and Selkirk, up the main streams into the rivulet and burns of high Peebles and into Covenanter land, where the lore is dourer than ever because these men and women were determined to keep their rights of conscience at all costs. As Robert Burns has emphasized, this attitude

Cost Scotland blood—cost Scotland tears,
But it sealed Freedom's sacred cause.

“Christopher North”, the genial and giant Professor of Philosophy at Edinburgh a century ago, Scrope, and much later Francis Francis and William Senior have praised the charms of these running waters, of the singing reel, the bending rod, and of fighting salmon and trout. But the Cheviot of the timber worker, the Border of the shepherd, go wider even than the haunts of romance and of river-sport. Away in the rounded hills where the brooks may be leapt or crossed by mere ford-tracks, there is an attractive wilderness for the finding. Every town and village along Tweed and Till and Teviot, along Jed and Yarrow and Leader, has its history, but the wanderer looks to the present. The old drove-road and the secret paths so jealously guarded are still there. My nostrils still reek of the sweet, bruised reeds, and before my eyes dazzles the heat-haze of many a summer afternoon, but the satisfaction is still deeper and more spiritual.

LAMMERMUIRS

The country of the Lammermuirs is just as truly Tweedside as the land of Melrose and the Eildon Hills. The Whitadder and its partner, the Blackadder, run down long wrinkles in the grass country, turning here and there to avoid some mighty outcrop of volcanic rock, winding beneath pine woods, wimpling across bright shallows where in former times the road dipped to a ford, and not to the present less picturesque bridges. Quiet, homely country is the Lammermuir, yet not too easy for the wanderer to subdue. Not everywhere is there accommodation on offer.

Under such circumstances a pleasure is added to travel, for the lack of inn and of the conventional boarding-house means that a home must be sought among the workers. The villages are mostly but and ben, or in humblest homes one large room beneath the tiles is the place where the whole of the workers' indoor life must be passed. Here and there a hut built of mud survives, its wall standing dourly without the protection of weather board and with a touch like fine cement. For the most part the hard freestone of the hills has been put into use.

To Lammermuir came little (it seems) of Border warfare. It was far beyond reach of the hectic brief raid, and in old times its woods were fastnesses to be avoided. Today only enough remains to show what precious delights Scotland lost when the need for charcoal caused the stripping of the hillsides. The country nowadays is arable and pasture; even the hill tops and high plateaus come under cultivation where that is possible. At an altitude which in Cheviot would mean morass and sweet reed, there is here a goodly panoply of haystacks. It has been my fortune to wander well into Lammermuir, and to find little hindrance to any cross-country route on which the mind was set. A field-path or cart-track was ever enough to excuse a wanderer.

Before motor-cars and buses came, the good folks of this countryside were great walkers, going on business a dozen miles there and the same back without knowing that athletics were part of their daily task. Towards the kirk people used to be viewed plodding, steadily yet rapidly, from all points of the compass, and many a worshipper placed twenty miles to the credit between breakfast and the return home to an evening meal. The Scotland of Sir Walter Scott seems to be around these glens and by these burns or waters; it is an out-of-date land in some senses, but not in regard to work. Its people are renowned far into the Lothians for skill in hedging, draining and fence-walling. These are points to remember, for they bring you into closer communion with the people than anything else. The country folk of Scotland hold their chiefest interest, after of course the spiritual, in all that pertains to their daily labour, and to praise its excellence is at once truthful and wise.

COVENANTER LAND

Of the circle of moors to the west, where Tweed comes so close to Clyde that they have been said to "rise in one hillside", I might write much and with pleasure. Suffice it, however, to make an excerpt from a diary written during a wander through this Covenanter land late in the year: "Today's wind and rain has added to the difficulty of walking from Tibbie Shiel's famous hostelry at the head of St. Mary's Loch down to the lost Kirk of St. Mary's, once enriched by the hunting Stuarts to £2000 a year as the great chapel of Ettrick Forest, up the Meggatt, over the ride to Talla Linns and Gameshope, then through the winding paths to Tweedsmuir, and the infant river roaring by the great Carlisle-Edinburgh road. Yesterday, too, it was Covenanter Land, but clear was

Cliffs at St. Abb's, Berwickshire

[Photo by Robert Adam





the air of Yarrow and Ettrick, there was a smirch of snow on the high ridges, and in the shadows the breeze was caller to discomfort. These wild moors and riven cloughs round Ettrick, Tweed, Yarrow and Moffat still speak of heroes who have suffered and passed to their reward.

"As I sat an hour in Tibbie Shiel's dark kitchen, by the box-bed where the Ettrick Shepherd slept, I felt his spirit close indeed. Surely of all tales of the supernatural that one excels which tells of the priest who fell from grace and was tempted of the devil with the body of a beautiful woman. One night per month he was empowered to withdraw her from home up to the desecrated kirk, and after that her memory was to be blank. But two outlaws, Covenanters, marked from their refuge in the rocks the maiden escorted by a fairy light to her awful tryst, and determined to intervene. Thus when again she trod the path, the demon beacon floated forward, but the Open Page laid across the way quenched its glow. The maiden was, however, still in her lover's power, and would press forward despite of all. With her, weapon in hand, marched the two men to the kirk, which was filled with glow of fire, and where the wicked priest awaited his prey. A double bullet sent his brains against the wall, and the Covenanters dragged his corpse from the smoke-dark church to bury it outside. James Hogg never wrote a finer tale—nor did anyone else. And today as I pushed through mist and rain I thought much of these stout old believers who lurked in these unquiet and sterile regions, pursued whenever seen by dragoons and yet managing to keep the souls of their flocks sealed to liberty. For scores of men and women, old and young, marched through these high, bosky, intricate wastes to share in worship at the forbidden conventicle.

"The sudden raid, the short shrift of sword and bullet, the long weary prison penance, these the leaders and their people risked at every turn—and in apparent defeat they won abiding victory and, what is more, vindication of their stand. The tumulus on the burn-side, scarce visible among the grass, is to me a far more elequent tribute than the simple headstone with sad inscription in many 'martyr's kirkyards'.

They were blest beyond compare
When they held their trysting there,
Among those greenest hills shone on by the sun.

"Grey and gloom revels in these deep-cut glens. The mist leaps from one hill to the next, casting veils and billows of rain. The linns are roaring full and white, but their sympathy is silenced by the shrieking gale which today holds sway. The eerie call of the curlew, the hoarse choir of the grouse go unheard up here in the land of Doom. And by Talla loch the storm holds revel, scooping great sheets of water, uplifting them in twisting spirals which sweep hither and thither, now high above the surges, now sweeping against some rocky headland and throwing its wet ghost blanket high over the path and up the hillside.

B

Shore where Mary Queen
of Scots embarked

Photo by Douglas Scott]

"The key-tint of Covenanter land today is grey—grey like the cause which seemed to perish just before the full dawn of freedom of conscience in Scotland, grey with its whirl of storm-cloud and driving rain, symbolic it may be yet again of the stressful days of old. Veteran ministers of the Word, cultured and city-lettered, have passed through November grey and storm such as this on the errand which even they did not know as mighty.

"Thus have I come across Covenanter land—Moffat, Ettrick, Meggatt, Gameshope—to feel a new spirit in the wilderness, to be roused by a message which, though old, is ever new; though weak is ever strong; though grey is yet rosy with the hues of freedom and eternal love."

Up on the heights is curlew-dom, the great morasses and flows where the whaup whistles and the plover calls, and where in high summer there are also those erstwhile shore-dwellers, the dunlin and the redshank. Its "rights-of-way" lead to many a corner forgotten by modern progress. Ghost stories not a few remain here, but the modern narrator is suspect of ribaldry, and with every generation fewer hear the gruesome old yarns of the countrysides.

DEVIL'S BEEF TUB

The country round Moffat is cut up by deep glens and high ridges. The Devil's Beef Tub, where the road for Edinburgh escapes out of the glen, is one of the sights of southern Scotland. In my first Scottish march—well over fifty years ago—I walked into Moffat, and was told that the old coach road was a grass-grown, rutty track, making a rise of 1300 feet in about four miles. I followed it to the top of the first steep pitch, and then took the old road for Glasgow and the north. The route swings away to the west, then returns to the lip of a ridge overlooking a mighty hollow (I do not know where the following quotation was picked up).

"Douglas's Beef Tub."

"They say it's the Devil's."

"That old gentleman was never honest enough to keep the Border law so he left the job of lifting cattle to the Douglasses. They were a rough and riotous crew, never working at their fields, but riding over the Border at dusk, rounding up English cattle, and crossing the fords ere dawn. And after them chased the English. Under the law of 'hot trod' pursuit they had the right to follow into Scotland after newly-lost cattle and gear. No Scot might say them nay—or else he might bid farewell to his black stots and sheep next time the Bewcastle thieves were out.

"Douglas ran the beasts into the old forest, and by the hidden track to Moffat over Eskdale muir. Once within this cove of the hills they were his. No warrior was needed to herd fat and hard-driven cattle beneath these green walls of 2000 feet. Behind this was the track through the hungry forest, and recollection of goads and blows. In front, steep heights drew up into the mists. There the herd remained until Douglas had need to draw supplies from his Beef Tub."

Today the wind blows strong over the moors near Tweed; there is mist down on the road; there is the drive of rain. Just such a day perhaps as that on which a Scottish clansman, prisoner after the surrender at Carlisle, broke from his captors and raced down the steep slope. No Hanoverian could match him in that declivity. The soldiers merely sent a few musket-balls into the whirling mist. Then they doctored the muster-roll of prisoners, probably adding that one had "died on the road". The Highlander was never recaptured though he settled in Border country.

My first crossing of the Beef Tub pass was on a summer morning. All night I had marched through the scented darkness, and now the mists were breaking. There was a chill touch in this high-country air which was pleasant after drougthy July days near the sea. Then the clouds burst aside, and I looked into that green, sun-filled pit, an immense distance below. No wonder I have respect for this great road across the hills. Another passage was in winter gloom—there was more than a touch of frost and snow in the blast; one heard pibrochs in the storm, with now and then a sharper call, echoes of the long-lost stage-coaches which made their way from Moffat to Edinburgh. Yet I like to think of the Beef Tub road as it must have been before Telford constructed his winding track, with a road going to the left for Glasgow. The way out of the great hollow at the head of Annan water must have been very steep. It was hardly one of our "Thieves" Roads. When Prince Charlie sent his Highlanders south, the nearest column marched by St. Mary's Loch, and down the gorge close to the greatest waterfall in southern Scotland—the Gray Mare's Tail.

That particular route passes the waterfall, and a track goes off to Loch Skene, 1080 feet up in the flank of the great Hart Fell. This resembles slightly the darkest and most sinister of Cumbrian mountain tarns. Its basin is pent in by hills showing more or less extensive outcrops of rock, among which nests still the raven and the carrion crow, birds of the wilderness, croaking, screaming, whirling up into the blue vault, the grey murk. The great forest between Moffat and the Cheviot is remote even to wanderers. Much of the area is given over to grouse, and therefore inaccessible because the grouse-shooter does not tolerate an inn or boarding-house near his ground. In Southern Scotland, at any rate, there is little danger of collision with their myrmidons so long as the nesting time of the birds is observed, and the months in which the "gentlemen" are "up".

I have wandered all autumn and far into spring without let or hindrance, though others seem less fortunate. I have no dog at my heels, and do not light matches near heather. Perhaps the philosophy of the wanderer sometimes fails when facing a rather surly guardian of sport; there is a good deal in "mannishment", and a bold face at the keeper's door is worth many times the shrinking back-view of a conscious trespasser. To my mind, the keeper may, or may not, be entitled to a close scrutiny of any venturers within his domain, but the result of such action

is usually satisfactory. It is well not to be taken for a poacher, lurking in the folds of the hills and making his preparation for a night's haul from the preserved game.

DRINKING AT RIVER SOURCES

In a life-time of wandering, I have tasted at the source of many of Scotia's noblest streams. Most of them rise at great elevations, and in remote roadless country—either deer forest or grouse moor, sheep pasture or plain, stark wilderness. Others, however, are fairly accessible from the roads—Tweed's Well, where the "Bonnie Tweed" rises, is on an upland meadow 1250 feet above sea level, in sight of the Moffat to Edinburgh road, and maybe a school hut still marks the situation. Purists may decree that Tweed's Well is only the accredited source, for Corse Hill and Flecket Hill rise 450 and 400 feet respectively over the level of the meadow, and between them send down the Corse Burn, which receives the outflow of the well. It is the Corse Burn therefore, which is the highest spring of Tweed. But it is more convenient to meet it near Tweed Cross, a monument erected by pious hands 1632 feet above the sea, to guide travellers across this desolate moorland. In its early course the Tweed flows mostly north, making a sharp turn eastward near Broughton. The Edinburgh road follows the hollow down Tweedsmuir, to Neidpath Castle and Peebles.

This upland is a prolific watershed, giving birth to three chief rivers of the Scottish lowlands.

Annan, Tweed, and Clyde,
Rise a' oot o' ae hillside.
Tweed ran, Annan wan,
Clyde brak its neck o'er Corra Linn.

The River Annan has its source in the Devil's Beef Tub, about a mile and a quarter away in direct line from Tweed's Well, and at a much lower elevation. To get at this spring, except on foot, the road must be taken round by Moffat, and the Annan and its dale followed to the head. The Annan spring I chose was at the foot of a steep green rise. The grazings around were formerly the feeding place of cattle "lifted" by the Johnstones and other clans over the English border.

With regard to Clyde, the true source (Daer Water) is nearly ten miles to the west, rising at 2285 feet on Queensbury, a commanding peak which marks the watershed between Annandale and Nithsdale, beyond the broad strath used by the railways and the Glasgow main road above Beattock. As if to justify the rhyme, there is a side-water called Clyde's Burn, which rises in the Hazelbush hill, an eminence opposite Tweed's Well, and makes its way to the north-west instead of the north.

Of the other South Scotland streams, Esk rises in Cross Hill on the border between Dumfries-shire and Selkirk, and the road alongside



[Photo by Valentine]

Pass of Killiecrankie: an entrance to the Highlands

Dunnottar Castle: where Scotland's Regalia was in Peril

[Photo by Douglas Bolton]





passes through Langholm; it becomes the White Esk in its upper part. I prefer to drink my Esk spring near the road which crosses from Langholm to Ettrick. An object on this road is the great observatory (Eskdalemuir) which stands on the edge of wild moors. The Nith which enters the Solway at Dumfries rises as Powhelly Burn, a few miles east of Dalmellington on the River Doon. There are grand roads and fine scenery on this stream, and some wild road passes to the Clyde. At Sanquhar, the direct Kilmarnock road is left for a route to the west, and in due time the uppermost bridge of Powhelly is crossed. I have never progressed further upstream than this. In fact, I am not sure that on the misty rainy day even the correct bridge was discovered. The Solway Dee which comes through Kirkcudbright has one or two wild lochs in its system, which is fairly served by roads. It has been described as a zone of the Highlands which has strayed too far south, with much stern strong colour, blue pines, shaggy woods, twisting loch shores and dancing torrents. The source is the Water of Deugh, rising from the south side of Wedder Hill, close to the Ayrshire border. Some of the waters in this system have been impounded for the purpose of hydro-electricity, and pylons dance over the skylines.

The Forth is the next Scottish water system; the two sources unite a mile west of the Clachan of Aberfoyle. The Duchray spring at which I have tasted is about 3000 feet above sea level, on the north side of Ben Lomond (3192 feet), and only one and three quarter miles from the shores of Loch Lomond. The course of this stream is much broken by falls, and far wilder than the southern rivers already described. The other source Avondhu (black water) rises 1900 feet above the sea, and after nine miles of rapid descent passes into Loch Chon, 290 feet, and is afterwards a more peaceable stream.

The Tay rises as the Fillan water, at 3000 feet above sea level in the face of Ben Lui. For most part of the year this spring is covered with snow. I have not found the water earlier than July, and it is hidden again in October. The corrie forms the upper end of a highly eroded basin of great extent, and touches the main water parting of the country. Just round the edge of Ben Lui, from the source of Tay, are the springs which descend to the Orchy, Loch Awe, River Awe, and the sea-loch Etive. The nearest village is Tyndrum, whence a track winds across the moor to the highest sheep farm. The spring is a steep rise above that. Lower down the Fillan becomes the Dochart, threads some lochans at Crianlarich, and enters the head of Loch Tay at Killin. After the loch, the water is known as the Tay.

The River Dee which flows past Royal Balmoral to enter the sea at Aberdeen rises in remote and wild country indeed. From even the highest road point, at White Bridge, there is a tramp of several hours through the most rugged and increasingly steep and difficult country. The spring (Dee Well) is 4060 feet, higher than any similar source in Britain, and I have never found it free of snow. The water is always bluish and snow-fed, and comes from the only permanent snowfield in Britain. The

The Sutors of Cromarty
with fisher-hamlet

Photo by Valentine]

grizzly cliffs that guard
The infant rills of Highland Dee

send down wild torrents which combine at the foot of Cairn Toul, and flow to the Linn of Dee. Here the channel becomes suddenly narrowed by great masses of rock through which the concentrated waters of many burns rush in a channel only about four feet wide. The pool below is deep and black.

With regard to the springs of the River Don, which also reaches the sea at Aberdeen, I have not yet found the opportunity to drink there, but still hope for luck. The source is said to be about 1640 feet above sea level—quite moderate for a Cairngorm river—in a peat moss in the high hills adjoining Ben Avon. Three times I have been within six miles of the spring and once a little nearer.

The River Spey rises in the wildest part of Badenoch, and has a course of 100 miles, through the grandest part of the Highlands. The source is conventionally Loch Spey, and a skilled driver can take a car to Meall Garbha, within a couple of hours of this, using General Wade's old road into Corrieyarrick Pass. The loch is an eye in a heather moor, far from the nearest sheiling, and the tramp is exhilarating though not difficult. Strangers to the north, however, should respect the roughness of the ancient "right of way", which passes along the lochan and goes away over the watershed to Lochaber.

I would like to compare the taste of great river sources. That of Tweed is bright, crystal yet with a golden honey tinge from heather and peat. Tay is usually a black contrast to the snow wreaths around, and at 3000 feet the air tingles. If I describe the spring of Royal Dee as pungent, I mean that it has the tang of snow-water in it, though possibly geologists would prove to me that really the spring derives from some deep-seated point. The Spey has a clear tinge, a soft taste, as it escapes from the lochan to dance steadily down the stones.

BIRD CLIFFS OF ST. ABB'S

The Berwickshire coast, despite the proximity of the eastern trunk railway, is a delectable haunt, especially in the late spring when the gulls and other sea-birds are nesting on the ledges, the pigeons haunt the caverns, and the peregrines come down from the still cold moors to harry and to slay. What a wealth of bird life comes to the white-stained crags about St. Abb's, how the birds flow and scream and wheel, now rising almost to invisibility and then spiralling down to the purple blue ocean, and alighting near the patches of green submerged reefs, ever flicking across the sunshine until one feels that the shadows are of mighty snow-flakes, dazzling and whirling in mid-air, never settling down to earth. And how the tide ruffles the under-cliff, picking out in white foam the further skerries, and isolating great boulders of brown and grey and black. But best of all are the stacks on which at such times the birds seem veritably

to scramble for a crowded foothold. But behind this iron coast, dented here and there to make a harbour for the netters of salmon or for boats of trawled fish, or a shore-line of sand-dunes behind which is the inevitable links, is a county of quiet farm-lands, lifting upward to an open, grim moorland. From every hummock of the laws or hilltops, the sea is visible sometimes to north-west as well as east, and the wanderer ever feels the salt tang in the breeze as he breasts the last slope from the shallow valleys. The fishermen of this coast are quaint, refreshing. Rab is full of poetic affection; Jock, his mate, is dour. He would not raise his eyes for all the pageantry of the Grand Fleet—such a scene would be but a gilding of the day's work, and wholly unnecessary.

These two men and their like I have met on many a day both along the Berwickshire coast and over the deep waters. When the gannets and the seafowl were nesting, I was tempted to land for a tide on the Bass Rock. There had been wind, and a big swell was booming up the Forth. "It's no a day for the Bass," commented Jock, but the hire was good and he flung the tiny sail to the breeze. Rab was silent. His eyes dwelt lovingly on the grey-walled islet which has weathered storm and siege, which has known comedy, defiance, torture and heroism. It might be no day for the Bass, but it was certainly no day to remain ashore. A smart, unsettled wind jerked into squalls, and at the end we were glad to get into the lee of the island for safety. Waves burst over the only landing place. We ran close enough to raise the colony of gannets in alarm—and even the rap of the waves could not drown their angry cries. "Gulls of the devil" was Rab's description of the solan goose, but that is unfair. There are far more sinister birds than this, and if one bird excels others in attributes of His Satanic Majesty it is surely the skua, robber and pirate and bully of all other gulls.

It was Rab who showed me one of the great bird colonies about St. Abb's, but it was Jock who ran me down to the cave of the seals and wild pigeons. That experience gave me a glorious scrape! A piece of wet seaweed caused me to slip, and I came down a rough sandstone slab with ultra-speed. At knee and shin and forearm a good quantity of skin was scraped away. I dislike seaweed more than ever, especially those long ribbons which the tide lazily but effectively winds round the feet of a swimmer. At a second cave, with a deep-water floor, there was a rare scare—a porpoise thundering down from the shadows and flurrying off to sea. This is the only time I met a porpoise among such ledges: a seal is of much more common occurrence. There are some glorious views along this coast-line—picturesque harbours, queer villages, forgotten industries. The fisher prefers to trust his life to many of his native handicrafts. If he went further, he would assuredly fare worse. A hand-spun line, a hand-knotted net, a hand-shaped spear or hook, always serve best. There are historic ruins along the coast, rock-arches, towers and pinnacles. There are reefs which delight the lover of sea-trash, there are sand-spits which render the river entrances awkward of navigation.

Everywhere along shore the houses reek of fish, the garbage is fish refuse, fish scales glisten on knitted jersey or plaided dress.

I remember well the furious scene when the dour Jack was likened to a chapter of Leviticus and his comrade Rab to a Psalm. The longshore Scot has a keen sense of fitness in language and expression, but my remark was innocent, without guile. Rab had likened the gulls at the drain-end to the white souls of fisher folk who had gone forward, and Jock surmised as there might be ghostses, at least some of 'em. Neither can help the conviction which is within him. Neither can agree that the whole universe is unveiled except to the spirit. But indeed such men would rather talk of voyaging to Iceland or the White Sea—not pleasurable memories these to the fisher-kind—than discuss the matter.

The lofty sea-cliffs from St. Abb's to Fast Castle can almost compare with those of Bempton and Flamborough on the Yorkshire coast for busy and noisy bird population. Every day of May the ledges and nesting holes over the surging tide becomes more and more crowded; the noise rises to mighty tumult. The crashing of the waves against the reefs is a mere rumble compared with the disturbed cries of the birds. Herring gulls, the joy of the cliff in their breeding plumage, vary their clamour from explosive kack-kack to ringing and raucous cyah-cyah. A plaintive kate-a-wake shows where the "rock petrels" are nesting. The guillemots are more peaceful; they send up a never-ending gurgling chorus, and the sea-parrots or puffins expostulate in bird Billingsgate as they stand guard by the old rabbit hole which serves as nesting tunnel. The guillemot lays its eggs on the ledges or in odd nooks among the rocks; the razorbills place the single egg in a crevice, often safe from human marauders; the herring gull, though nesting on the slopes low down the cliff, chooses a home of turf which is trampled into a solid mass by the owners. The gannet or solan goose prefers the dark walls of the Bass Rock to those of St. Abb's Head; terns, oystercatchers, ringed plovers and black-headed gulls nest on the soft sand or among the tough marsh grass. But there are thousands of herring gulls, kittiwakes, guillemots and puffins on the cliffs overlooking the homes and fishing places of the others. At chosen spots there are nests of razorbills, and very handsome birds they look as they sit sedately on their eggs, or hurry past in flight, the white eye-streak relieving the sombreness of their plumage. There are shags or cormorants on the lower ledges, but they are few compared with the hordes which emit din and effluvia on the Farne Islands, off the Northumberland coast, among the "Pinnacles". The eider duck still maintains a timid colony in a secret nook, but the considerable settlement of lesser black-backed gulls has dwindled to a few pairs. There are a few pairs of peregrines, jealous and destructive falcons which mark out large territories for possession, and, of course, in the caves and broken crags there are rock pigeons and jackdaws. The latter are terrible thieves, and their attempts on the smaller cliff-birds keep the rocks in a turmoil.

The great cliff of Whiteheugh has its name locally from the droppings of nesting sea-birds. Its last descent is a sheer 100 feet to the tide, but the upper portion is more broken. The lighthouse cliff of St. Abb's is decorated with birds, and the air is filled with their wild cries. The glorious Cleaver rock beyond the lighthouse is worthy of special record. It towers up like a gigantic crumpled slate on end and covered with gulls and guillemots. The bird-cliffs are about four miles from end to end, but the seaward face is much broken by rifts and gullies, and the path is circuitous.

Of the crowded coasts of Forth, with their busy towns, their ships and coal mines and industries and of the great city Edinburgh, the wanderer in his true mind knows but little. Who would not exchange the rich parks of Dalmeny and Dalkeith, with their gently made roads and doctored views for a mile of upland bog where the air hangs sweet with the odour of flowering reeds, and the hefty peat reek calls to sturdy action. Still there are a few recesses in the Pentlands and among the Moorfoot hills where peace reigns supreme, and the wanderer may foregather with a few kindred spirits. If rest is needed, then the soft environs of a great city, reeking of opulence, convenience and rich fare, may attract. But for real life let's stick to our peaks and moors, our glens and rushing waters, our village and glen folk.

The Western marches of the Border have districts scarcely less lonesome than the passes of the Cheviots, but the hand of the modern in railways, trunk roads, and industries rests more heavily in some places. The fords of Sark and Esk, fronted by the once well-nigh impassable Sollom Moss, and the tidal path across Solway are the ancient approaches today superseded by efficient bridges, railways and cement roads. A mere clause in an Act of Parliament wiped out the old marriage traffic to the Forge and Inn to which runaway couples came in haste from the south. It had been dwindling in importance for years. The western hollow, with Skiddaw lordling it from the south-west and Criffel on the west, and a fringe of hills from Bewcastle and the Roman Wall through Moffat to the back of Clydesdale, has plenty of quiet interest. But "Red-Gauntlet" and Robert Burns notwithstanding, we are facing towards Galloway with its high lochans, rough paths and glorious moorlands. Lochmaben of Dumfries-shire begins the sequence of beauty which grows more decided as the way goes westward, through the Nith country with its blackgame and out into the wilderness of grouse, salmon and trout.

WESTERN MARCHES: THE SOLDIERS' ROAD

Through this countryside the soldiers passed from the garrison of Carlisle to Northern Ireland. Carlisle was ever the knotting place of the roads between England and Scotland. After the Union of Crowns in 1603, the citadel ceased to be the western bulwark against the Scottish raid and invasion, and in 1745 the city

with its castles and bastions an' a', an' a'

was so weak and ill-manned that it had to surrender to the clans under Bonnie Prince Charlie. In a few weeks Charles came back in a tremendous hurry, and he left the remnant of the Manchester Regiment as garrison to its fate—which was tragic.

After this incident the Government became more concerned about the safety of Carlisle. Regular regiments were drafted there, and, until the invention of railways, it was "on the rowt" of every soldier who had to go to Northern Ireland. The historians tell us of the road which was constructed by the orders of General Wade along Hadrian's Wall after 1745, but less known is the military road which went from Carlisle through Galloway to Port Patrick for Ireland. Part of the way is followed by the modern motor route through Annan, Dumfries, Castle Douglas and Newton Stewart, but there are leagues where the old route is lane, quiet, steep, and now nearly filled with brambles. There is one such bit between Dumfries and Crocketford. Here the old road keeps up a steep incline while the new one winds to a low saddle or pass, and comes back to the old track at an inn which dates from droving times at least. The military route through Galloway was a practical way rather than a strategic or fighting route, and the scores of defensible castles, camps and forts belong to some much earlier period.

Later on the Galloway men were sea pirates, and used their boats to raid Cumberland a little and the Isle of Man rather much. Indeed, in the Isle, one clan from Galloway became part of a prayer :

Keep me, my good cows, my sheep and my bullocks,
From Satan, from sin, and those thieving McCullochs.

The soldiers bivouacked and camped by the wayside and on the commons, and a few field names are evidence of their halts. There was little effort to construct forts, cantonments or barracks. The old enlisted men—with the camp-following wife and bairns—were hardy folks, and did not mind an occasional shower, which might be days in length, of Galloway rain. The veterans round the night camp-fire might tell of route-marching, when changing garrison in far-off India, of strange cities and peoples, of mysterious forest and jungle roads, of snakes and dangerous tigers, of brain-shaking heat and thick dust, none of which were met on the old soldier road through Galloway. There is nothing dramatic about the route ; from every hill-top the sea seems visible to the south ; the Mourne Mountains in Ireland are more prominent with every league, particularly on the last long stage across the level Rhinns of Galloway.

Just before that the wide expanse of Luce Bay to the south was the scene of a war tragedy in 1917, the publication of which was censored, and the incident almost forgotten :

The steamer *Main of Cardiff* had taken refuge from a fierce southerly storm and was at anchor when a German submarine opened fire, wrecking

the steamer's gun and riddling the ship's hull. One lifeboat was shattered in the bombardment: the other got away with the fifteen men who served as crew. However the boat capsized again and again, and gradually all the men were washed off except the captain. He clung desperately to the upturned boat for fifteen hours before it grounded on the shingle. There was a rush to his aid, and his first words were: "Is there ony person here can gi'e me claiths? I had to put off my coat to swim the lighter." He was an immense man, a native of Campbeltown, weighing 22 stones, and it was his immense shield of fat alone that enabled him to survive the long drawn out horrors of that night and day.

There was another battle in Luce Bay in March 1760, when Thurot, the French privateer who surprised Carrickfergus Castle and almost penetrated to Belfast, was in turn surprised by three British frigates under Captain Elliot. The forces were fairly equal, but the British were fresh, and the French, after a long voyage, in desperate danger. Thurot was killed in action, and his body, washed ashore in Luce Bay, was buried with honour. Here and there on the beach are found flat pudding stones of iron pyrites, which the old fishermen declared to be cannon-balls from this grim sea fight.

WHERE QUEEN MARY EMBARKED

Dumfries-shire is ever a friendly and happy county to me, and I must return from Luce Bay to Dundrennan to the place where Queen Mary of Scotland embarked to cross the Solway Firth. This description was written on the spot. Today I muse among the Solway rocks and reconstruct the tragic passage of Mary Queen of Scots over the tide to England. The Cumbrian coast stands out clearly for the distance is only 18 miles, and the great peaks of Skiddaw and Helvellyn, each over 3000 feet, are easily visible. Some historians assert that the Queen and her retinue embarked at Burnfoot where a lane comes down from Dundrennan Abbey where she spent her last night in Scotland. It is an open shingle however, and a big open fisher-boat, with a crew of four men, would scarcely use it. A mile to the eastward is this Port Mary where a barrier of rocks runs down to deep water, and where access at all states of tide is possible. Despite the neighbourhood of a mansion house among the trees, this historic little opening is quiet. You come to it easiest on foot from the west, following either the shingle and rocky shore, or by a mile of green track along the cliffs from Burnfoot, depending on tide and weather condition. The other access from Dundrennan is over private land, I am told, but I have never been questioned.

About Queen Mary's strand, the oyster-catchers, with magpie plumage and coral-red legs and beak, fuss and quaver. Now they drop among the tide-rounded stones and now fly across the sea. It is far past the time for eggs and fledglings; indeed their broods have gone away with the other young sea-birds of the shore, and the adults have nothing to fear from the visitors. Out in the Hebrides one day I was told that the oyster-

catcher had the second name of Mary's Page, because it dwelt near the shore among hermits and saints, and in simpler days carried messages from one to another over wild seas and rocky lands. I wonder if these wailing and fussy birds have a message from or for Mary Queen of Scots, a woman who will never be forgotten.

Over the moving tide there is a wail of blackheaded gulls and sea-mews, a cormorant rests a moment on the outer pinnacle of Queen Mary's "causeway"; rooks, curlews and plovers call, whistle and scream. On the greensward there is beauty of flowers, sea pinks, daisies, irises in the marsh caused by the flooding brook. Tall golden rod and harebells are rising among the rocks and in the brakes where roses, hawthorns and brambles trail. This point of uplifted reef has a sheltered lee where a craft drawing a fathom of water could be brought alongside. Red and sulphur lichen has dusted itself among the rough stones right down to tide-mark.

It was about seven in the morning of Sunday, May 16, that the Queen, with her one female attendant, Mary Setoun, embarked here. Three days previously, she had seen her unwieldy army of adherents out-manceuvred and dispersed by a small trained force under the Regent Moray. Robertson the historian says :

When the Queen saw the army, which was her last hope, thrown into irretrievable confusion, her spirit, which all her past misfortunes had not been able entirely to subdue, sunk altogether. In the utmost consternation, she began her flight, and so lively were her impressions of fear, that she never closed her eyes till she reached the abbey of Dundrennan in Galloway, fully sixty Scottish miles from the field of battle.

On the journey the Queen apparently got Mary Setoun to cut off her hair to assist her disguise. At Lochinvar Castle, where she halted a short time, she obtained a hood and cloak, wraps doubly welcome during the camping-out in the cold spring air of the Scottish uplands. The cavalcade which made this wild rush from the battleground was between 20 and 30 riders, and included Lord Herries, who lived at Dundrennan. This lord did everything possible to prevent Mary from throwing herself into the power of Elizabeth, and the Archbishop of St. Andrews, who arrived at Dundrennan during their one day of rest, went down with the little party to the strand and besought the Queen, with an impassioned speech interspersed with many historical allusions, not to leave her own country. A story is recorded that this distracted cleric, a devoted Hamilton, waded into the water when the boat pushed off, and, in his despair, clutched the boat to stop the fatal journey. It is quite clear that the Queen had lost courage, and was terror-stricken to the point of panic, as she feared capture at any moment. A few weeks previously she had escaped from the dungeons of Loch Leven castle, and she had no hope of good treatment, even of her life, by her Scottish foes.



[Photo by Douglas Bolton]

Storm-cut chasm in Duncansby Head



To her mind, England, under Elizabeth, who had written her fair words and previously offered her an asylum—England remained her only hope, and she was resolved to go thither. Herries, by her command, wrote to Lowther, the deputy-governor of Carlisle, to know what reception he would give her, and, before his answer could return, her fear and impatience were so great that she got into a fisher-boat and, with about 20 attendants, sailed across the Solway Firth to Workington where she arrived about seven in the evening. She was conducted first to Cockermouth and then with many marks of respect to Carlisle. Afterwards, however, her treatment was more severe, and she remained a prisoner, in one English castle or other, until February 6, 1586, when she was beheaded at Fotheringhay. When the Queen arrived at Workington, as she informed Elizabeth in a letter, she “had nothing in the world but her person, and nowhere to go at night”.

This was the tragedy, a stirring scene of which was enacted on this rocky shore of Solway long years ago.

The Stewartry of Kirkcudbright is still a land unknown save to the wanderer. The ancient soldier's road toward Ireland is left quickly by motor folk who travel, usually without more than one halt, into the real Burns country (Ayrshire). The presence here of sentimental crowds ban the quieter order main part of the year.

The Ayrshire of the majestic ploughman-poet is certainly not a place to ignore. At the coming of winter it dons the work-a-day habit, and reverts to its old glory of farming and shepherding, with here and there a break for some rustic festival at which Burns himself might have attended. These are quiet countrysides when the days are dull and the soft rain closes the higher ground; it is then that the wanderer gets into touch with dour and homely, happy and lively, men and women, discovers quaint corners of flooded river and soaking woodland, and many a hamlet whose only record seems to be a name and mileage in the county gazetteer. Nothing has yet happened there; nothing save the routine of years and seasons will happen. Twenty generations hence the rambling spirit will still recognize the true tone of peace in the waysides of Carrick and Kyle and Cunningham.

The coast of Galloway from Dumfries along to Port Patrick and Loch Ryan is far less famous than the hill country with its half-effaced tracks and forgotten passes and bealachs. For one thing, the soldier's road avoids the indented coast, cutting along the long easy shelves well inland. Again the country next the sea is richly agricultural, and therefore, according to some lights but not mine, a bit commonplace. Not that this term suggests tropical fertility to the soil hereabout; either by its inherent but not very obvious qualities, or more likely by the wonderful manipulation and evolutionary growth of its resources under generations of skilled farmers the land has been brought to high and well-deserved renown and productivity. The wanderer who goes aside to the Isle of Whithorn will find his effort well recompensed. Yet for a few leagues he passes out of guide-

Sutherland, overlooking Pentland Firth

Photo by Robert Adam]

book land and, taking his way westward and south at will, can easily lose the fretfulness and tedium of everyday life. Properly indulged, wandering is a wonderful bulwark against the evil spirit of monotony, for who can grow heedless when every turn of the lane shows fresh glories, fresh mysteries of Nature, seclusion, rest and peace? From Whithorn, in the days of Pictish Christianity, went forth the message of peace up the islands, across the Pentland Firth to find an echoing note of faith in the far-off Shetlands. No wonder then that the land still carries great joy to the spirit.

FINEST COASTAL ROAD?

Quite often I am urged to compare the coastal road from Stranraer to Girvan with a similar road which follows the Ulster shore of the North Channel. The great Lord Northcliffe placed on record his conviction that the Antrim coast road, which goes from Belfast to Glenariff and Cushendall (a distance of some 50 miles) was second in Europe for beauty and surpassed only by the Corniche road near Nice, which winds among grey olive groves and dark rocks, and has the blue sunlit Mediterranean below. It must be premised that the Corniche road is entirely artificial; that it was planned and built at enormous expense by capable engineers who studied safety and ease of travel as well as the fine outlook. The Antrim road has been varied in many places, and here and there short tunnels pierce the curtains of rock rather than the road should climb the ancient route over the steep and exposed headland.

Compared with these, the coastal road from Stranraer to Girvan is natural and unimproved. This does not mean that it is difficult or awkward, and I consider that it is as easy to drive as either of the roads mentioned. When this page was written, the coastal road at Glenapp turned up a beautiful glen, crossed near the head, and continued for several miles without sight of the sea. To Cairnryan going north, the views across the sea loch are pretty but not exciting, as the opposite shore is not steep and rocky. At one place there is a bit of cliff, and beyond it a lane down to the shore signifies the place of an ancient ferry. Beyond Cairnryan it is more interesting; the open sea is quite near, and there is a fine prospect across the Firth of Clyde to the Mull of Cantyre. Two or three small glens are crossed with their burns and bridges, then the road climbs round a corner into Glenapp where there is a wonderful view for a time. Then the road turns northward, and only the narrow Glen is visible with its road passing along one terrace, then crossing the bridge to a similar terrace which climbs higher and finally crosses a grass moor, and descends with long swings to the sea at Ballantrae.

The next section rises high, then falls, with long stretches at sea level. and with a mere strand, sand or broken rocks between road and tide. The seaward views are mostly to Ailsa Craig, and further north to the peaks of Arran. The road climbs over headlands here and there, and goes over the edge of the moor at times, giving the most splendid outlooks,

At any rate this bit compares favourably with the best of the Ulster road on the opposite side of the North Channel. It has plenty of variety, and not the dead level (almost) of the Antrim coast-road. Tastes differ, and it is difficult to be didactic and convincing about any bit of road in the world. If you have the chance, try both, and comprehend their special beauties and balance their advantages and disadvantages. There is a lot to be said for this road alongside Loch Ryan and the Firth of Clyde.

To me Ayrshire is divided between two zones: that from which one looks to the hills, and the other which looks out to Ailsa Craig and the isles and surging tides of Clyde. Perhaps the second is here my favourite, because elsewhere than in Ayrshire there are broader moors, deeper morasses, and shapelier heights. But the slope of country towards Ailsa and Arran are unique—until once again the links of the shore are touched, that narrow belt from Turnberry to Largs devoted to golf. The golfer is the least inquisitive of all sports-lovers: as a class, he scorns this charming hinterland and does not realize its nearness. The view from the last hill above Largs, with the Great and the Little Cumbraes, with the shimmering waters and the sea lochs cleaving here and there into the wall-like hills of Cowal, is one of Scotland's best. Let the wanderer go, map in hand, and find that mile of scenic drama, built on the noblest scale the mind of man can appreciate.

In their own open breezy fashion the headwaters of Clyde are picturesque. Outside the grouse breeding and shooting months there is little difficulty in passing anywhere in reason, though the "rights-of-way" are sometimes not too well defined, either in description or in actual traversable fact. To find a lusty route on the map dissolving into a series of bog-holes is no joke when darkness is already spreading pinions over the hills, and to decide that a well-made driving path is identical with the most attenuated Ordnance Survey lines is often enough a problem. The new course may change and curve in eccentric fashion, while yet the general trend be according to expectations. Put not your truth easily in lodge paths for sometimes they twist gently from the right way and may bring you into the presence of a roaring, red-faced keeper whose amiable and expressed desire is primarily to hasten the exit of all "towerists" with a charge of good small shot. "Cud ye no see? Ha'e ye no eyes?" for a hidden boggy twist where the private path came into existence maybe four miles or so back in the gloom. But hard words break no bones. More often the keeper is delighted at the chance of passing a word with another being, though a stranger. "I like th' wireless weel enough, but you get stalled o' listenin' to another fellow without chance of talking back to him."

To pass the ridges from Clyde to Nith, to Tweed and to Galloway is sometimes a long tramp and unless the season is one of veritable drought, rarely a dry one. Those springs of the upland are so deep-seated that ordinary summers fail to make impressions on the resources of their water-bearing gravels and deep-soaked mosses and basins of peat. The

Dalveen Pass is a motor-road, but the Well Path down to the Nith is worth attention, and there are some routes among the Leadhills which can be traced on spare days. The miles round Beattock where the great railway and trunk road pass to the north are well enough known, but the use of a map brings you into quiet places.

TINTO HILL

Near Lamington the Clyde is dominated by Tinto Hill, an isolated and picturesque mass 2335 feet high, and clad with grass and heather from base to summit. The ascent is a simple walk and the eastern slope is the steeper. The view of the Clyde from the summit is particularly extensive: the river almost encircles the hill, and road and railway come down alongside it from the wild hinterlands of Galloway and the bounds of Solway. Eastward, over a low and narrow watershed, parts of the Tweed valley can be seen. Northward, as the Clyde winds in that direction, is "The Garden of Scotland" with fruit beds and orchards, tomato culture on a grand scale, and market gardening. Beyond this again is the smoke of industry—the forges and furnaces of The Second City of the Empire.

The view includes Bass Rock in the Firth of Forth (N.E.) and Goat Fell, Arran (N.W.) in the Firth of Clyde. Points in 18 Scottish counties are visible, and peeps of England and Ireland are reported by some observers. The top is marked by a large cairn. A cynical local rhyme declares:

Be a lass ne'er so black,
Gin she hae the penny siller,
Set her up on Tinto's tap,
The wind will blaw a man till her.

To carry a stone to the top of Tinto Hill was in old times a common form of punishment. Sinners must have been numerous to transport stone by stone the material for the cairn which has a circumference of about 140 yards. The bright pink igneous rocks exposed by landslides are a striking feature.

The land round Lamington in 1836 was a desolate moor. The uncultivated hills were fringed with heather down to the high road, broken-down dykes alone divided the different farms, and the small crofter's cattle wandered about where they liked. The low ground, undrained, was little better than a morass, and as there was no dyke to arrest the rise of the Clyde in stormy weather, the whole flat country during the winter season was generally under water. The tenants in their thatched farm-steadings, paid their rent as they could out of whatever they had rescued from flood and storm. Hedges and fences were unknown. As for plantations, not a tree had ever been put into the ground. There existed a few remarkable old pines in the village of Lamington if such a name could be given to the collection of broken-down, peat-roofed, single-roomed bothies, that were

Erriboll: where Arctic waters roar

[Photo by Robert Adam]





situated on either side of the Lamington burn, and on the high road from Dumfries to Edinburgh, where the coach stopped once a week to whiskey-up at a low white-washed, thatched cottage, only a slight improvement on the others.

The following year a great change began. The Laird came to live in the village, and to improve the estate which had been neglected for a century. He and his bride were rebuilding houses and farms and inns for the next 24 years.

About this time Robert Burns stopped a night at Lamington on his way to Edinburgh. He went to church and was so little pleased that he left on the seat an epigram, called "The Kirk of Lamington"—

As cauld a wind as ever blow,
A cauld kirk and in't but few,
As cauld a minister's e'er spak,
Ye'll a' be het ere I come back!

In a few years (1840) the Parish Minister writes in *The Statistical Account*: "The people generally speaking are healthy and robust, of good size, and of active habits; . . . they are on the whole cleanly, orderly in their household economy, sober, temperate, peaceable, industrious and neighbourly and obliging to one another. . . . And withal I must call them an honest people."

On my first youthful tramp to the North, the mining and industrial belt of central Scotland was crossed in two miserably wet and cold summer days. I have also pedalled a cycle to the North. Now one is content to leave the lanes for a few hours and be hurled by bus up to Stirling where once again God's country is free from iron clangours, belching fumes and day-soaking vapours. Here and there, in this awful squalor, is a little glen, a patch of upland, where for a moment the grim factors of modern industry may be forgotten, but for the most part the way is unrelieved misery. Even the farms lie staring blindly at the smoke clouds, and the rivers run with iron and coal mud. Clyde itself, rattling ever so gaily above Lanark and roaring over the famous linns, becomes tainted and sombre as it crawls heavily towards the sea.

STIRLINGSHIRE HILLS

The hills toward Stirling which in former times formed the hunting parks of Scotland's kings are little more attractive to the wanderer than the links of Forth where the tide serpentines in puzzling fashion, until at Cambuskenneth there is puzzle which is the seaward direction, the relative position of the stream at our feet, and of the fortress of Stirling. There are glens among the Campsie fells and the hills of Kippen which are worth the visit if the wanderer has nothing better to do with a day, but the Highlands are now calling. The Forth is the doorway to real delights and freedoms. It is a wider, stronger, and deeper delight than the South.

C

Cape Wrath and Moors of the
Parph. Desolation in Sutherland

Photo by Douglas Bolton

Further up the river where the head of mighty Ben Lomond becomes dominant, there is more interest, but everything depends upon the presence of mountains. Aberfoyle and Menteith are merely tolerated because in the background are the great dark towers and spires of the bens.

Just north of Stirling, the rounded Ochils are pleasant enough. Here at times, within reach of the city belt of Scotland, there is transient yet possible snow for winter sports. The comparatively dry air, as in the Pentlands, keeps a tolerable surface for ski when the higher and more distant bens may be unassailable. My most pleasant memory of the Ochils is a two-nights' bivouac in a high glen, and the ramble through the steely hard dawnlight to watch the sun rise over Fife and the eastern sea. There have been comments by Southrons that the glory of sunrise in summer Scotland is not after all of a striking order. The glories of a new day breaking over Dartmoor, or over the hills of Wales, are chanted, and certainly it must be admitted that the lack of true darkness over the land on a clear night of July is a set-back to fireworks of the contrasty Southern order. But for my share I fared very well on that remarkable Ochil sunrise. The sky was rather set with clouds, and the sunrise rays and rainbow zones on these were gorgeous. The Ochil country may be over-run by a summer crowd—so far I have been fortunate to avoid them—outside, of course, the busy townlets and villages and the roads and lanes and paths between.

LOCHLEVEN TROUT

Coming out of Stirling, over the Ochils, the famous Loch Leven in Kinross-shire calls for admiration by more persons than trout anglers. The true *Salmo levenensis* is a proof of civilisation, specialisation, of realisations that waters are not merely desert, but sources of food. Its first home calls for worship quite as much as the island castle and the legend of the beautiful but ill-fated Mary, last Queen of Scots. Wherever *Salmo levenensis* survives transportation—and it is a hardy traveller and able to live under a variety of climatic conditions—there surely is a place where white men (and especially Scots) may fittingly dwell. "It's stocked with Loch Levens", means that the water is grand. From New Zealand glacier streams, from the rattling brooks of the Snaauwbergs in South Africa, from the hill streams of Nyassaland, from South American torrents and from Himalayan dams and Nilgerry pools, come home the thanks of a grateful Dispersal that this comforting element can be transported without loss of quality or sporting proclivities.

Of all Scottish counties Fifeshire seems to be the one with seaboard least interesting to the wanderer. The mud-links down from Stirling, the mining and linoleum country, golf and then the residential suburbs on the Tay approaching Dundee, are drawbacks. There was a charming long wander in and out of Cupar, and finally to the Tay high above the anchorage for ships which was mostly along footpaths and farm lanes.

Quiet but happy countrysides, well tilled and moderately prosperous, have a cheer for the soul, though cottages and steadings, then hamlets and villages may be rather numerous. The great tidal channel with its foaming rushing streams is always glorious to look upon, and beyond the hills, though low, were indeed the outposts of the mighty Perthshire highlands and therefore to be worshipped.

STRATHEARN

Between the Ochils and the great bens lies another stretch of delightful country. Dedicated to fruit-growing as to the lower shelves the land is crossed by railways and motor-roads. A steady prosperity seemed to forbid the romance and beauty of loved by poets. But Earn river was ever the haunt of mighty salmon and the upper waters are beloved of trout. The followers of Izaak Walton, or if you prefer it "Christopher North", have free rein here for their sport. It is a land of smooth waters, of osiers and sallows, of meadows rich with sweetness, of floods which rarely tear but press steadily down to the sea. I have every reason to misvalue the Strath of Earn. My first journey there was on a stormy summer day, with rain whipping viciously and more than a suspicion of hailstones. My second was on an autumn afternoon, when the mist hung damp, thick, wall-like, when the hills and Glen Artney did not exist, and even the slow, unfolding stream was a mystery. Again I tramped through the Earn land, but it was snow-time, and there was little satisfaction in covering a few cumbered miles. The air was thick, with no view of peaks near or far to console, to inspire. A mighty wandering, however, awaited me, here in Earnside. It was through the gloom of an August night that I walked up the shore of Loch Earn and away through Glen Ogle.

Sheer laziness caused that journey. On that occasion I had no particular objective so why trouble about trains? If such a convenience was due, well and good. If not, wander a few stations down the line to pass the time. My vagabond longings were strong enough to tolerate a sleeping place under a hedge or among the heather. It was a night of witchery indeed! Now and again, bens and peaks stood out sharp against the starlight. They were truly, in the words of a poet,

fretted against the vault of heaven.

The corries were filled with haze; the distant, loftier ones with cold blue tones; the near low ones with bronze shadows. The upper air was clear, the air soft. Here and there a white-walled house—cot, mansion or farm it might be—gleamed at us. This was no record-breaking journey. Between sunset and early breakfast it is easy to amble a good many miles, even though a midnight swim is indulged. Loch Earn is famous for its bathing. From that shingly point many a sound was heard; the otter's soft whistle, the plop of a marauding rat, the gentle voices of waterfowl at feed, the wild shriek of a disturbed heron, the squawk of a curlew, and

the all-night song of the sedge-warbler, "the fisherman's nightingale". The faint rustle of a rising fish, a splash as some jovial trout fell back from its leap after the great white bustards, was proof that fish-life was taking its pleasures at this quiet cool hour.

Dawn came early. But earlier still were the skylarks. The great blue arch, which, rising from the east, marks "the dark hour of the morning watch", had scarce begun to pale when the first bird rose with a chuckle, a sleepy rumble, winged steeply into the air, and burst into glorious song before it reached up to the first grey streaks of light. It is odd indeed to hear night owls hooting and shrieking, and skylarks singing at one and the same time. Glen Ogle in the early dawn looks grim and desolate, but that morning there was a touch of romance. A flock of sheep were moving, even so early, steadily along its road, with the drover keeping quiet pace with their progress.

Extremely attractive is Lower Strathearn of the quiet waters, of lush grass, of many-flowered river-banks, of alders and birches and elms and willows by the waterside. This speaks of angling days, when the utmost of a moderate skill had to be used to get a decent pannier. It speaks, too, of a day after flood, when the salmon were on the run and I worked long hours with a heavy rod to score a successful "blank". Every fish that rose escaped, and the chapter of accidents included a full-dress bath in a rock-pool. But the banks of Earn have other pleasures than the capture of trout and salmon. Have you ever examined the insect-life of a river pool? Horse gnats and black midges and minor mosquitoes sample one's blood mercilessly, but there are others less drastic in their habits. Take the drakes and the butchers so well known (in theory) to the angler. With a moderate lens you find how wonderfully shaped are these unimportant creatures. What a wealth of trouble Nature has taken to contrive them to their work? We are so accustomed to think of man as Nature's masterpiece that it is a shock to find what complications, provisions, colourations, mechanisms have been put into the lower forms of life.

In the main the Earn is a quiet stream, either giving the key-note to, or taking it from, its surroundings. The upper glens may lack the majesty of those which come down to Tay or Garry, but they are more accessible. You are in the outskirts of the hills, and to many that is enough. The more restless type of humanity must be wetted by the spray of torrents or must cling to tiny ledges of rock, but for him the Earn discloses little. There is more of population about the Earn than the Upper Tay and its tributaries, and that ill suits the talkative among the robust. Here the elements of romance are not driven away by storm and famine as in the glens of the wilderness, and there are quaint and historic places with full-satisfying elements of life. The grouse, the deer, the blackgame are just as interesting if not so plentiful, and the wild scream of the golden eagle, the croak of the raven is scarcely missed. The blue hare scampers just as madly "when no man pursueth", and roe and fox are glimpsed among the bracken and the short undergrowth.

PERTH AS GATEWAY

Perth City is best known as the gateway to the Highlands and as a strategic point dominating the long shelves which climb up to the Deeside Grampians as well as to Earnside and the tidal Tay. The genius who chose the site of Perth knew well his duty, for every glen of the great belt faces in that direction, and the city commands the lowest serviceable fords of the Tay. Moreover, the narrow throat of the water-pass above the city compelled the roads of old to pass within its domination. With Perth in enemy hands, the prospects of a campaign from the Highlands were always problematical, and a little garrison here was ever a safeguard.

Away up in the lower hills behind Perth are glories indeed. The first indication that a Scottish summer is far spent is that the vapour condensed over loch and bog and rill by chill nightfalls hangs denser and is dispelled more tardily in the rising day. No longer does the low-lying sunset-cloud caress, pause against and enfold the rocky battlement of Schiehallion; the mist is far beneath, steaming from Loch Tummel, from the Garry, and away up the high ridges on such a night there is outlook far and wide over what seems to be a frozen floor, through which shoulders here a tower like Buchaille Etive, a cone like Ben y Glo, or a tumbled mass like Farragon. The bronze gloom of the July midnight no longer clothes the moors, fills the corrie, swamps the forest; here is a wide-spreading mass of pearly grey, riven here and there by a wind-swirl so that the eye may look up, higher and ever higher, to the faint network of starlight. The departing hour of night becomes a time of might, of savage romance, a period of mysterious, witchful conjuring with the elements of familiar scenes.

KILLIECRANKIE

Dim in the upper forests along the Garry trench there is the stern pass of Killiecrankie. Here the purple-black cliffs shoot up and are then lost in the gloom of mid-heaven. Great loose ruins of mist tumble up and down the stony braes, flow lazily across the sheep-walks, break and burst against the sturdy crags, foam and whirl in the upper canopy of pine, around the sharp spires of larch and spruce. The glory of dawn becomes a dead-silver light creeping along and pluming the cascades, polishing the wet rocks with a cold effulgence. The white-stemmed birches stalk like sentries in and out of the passing shadows; the dark holly is a fortress, the yew a sinister blot of gloom. At such an hour in Killiecrankie one comes very close to the spirit of Aytoun's thrilling words, with their tender nuances of colour and temperament:

Slowly rose the mist in columns
From the river's broken way;
Hoarsely roared the swollen torrent,
And the Pass was wrapped in gloom,

just as it is today. Garry roysters the same old drinking-song, crashes in spray over the same iron-rocks, swirls and thunders down the dark defile, bursts in a white fury from the last bondage, and sloods more gently into the carse-lands of brave, ancient Dunkeld. The place, the early hour, is worthy of "Ian dhu nan Cath"—Dark John of Battles, Viscount Dundee—and cold must be the imagination which cannot people the heather and juniper, the fern and the coppice, with an array of Skyemen and Camerons, stern and wild fighters, sleeping the last minutes before the battle onset.

Forfarshire to the south and east of wild Perthshire was one of Scotland's neglected counties—until it bred the gracious lady who is now Queen. The hills are wonderfully interesting to the student of Alpine flora. Here in Forfarshire is the only British habitat in a state of Nature of many a flower the next location of which is either in Alpine Switzerland or in Arctic Norway. The passes through to Dee-side are not rocky, and until the petrol age were fairly used for local traffic in beasts. The railway by Aberdeen was too circuitous even for the slow but sure Scots while—hech, it's expensive. Up one glen of Forfarshire and down the next is a pretty pleasure, and though great lochs are scarce there are lochans among the broken corries and on the broad swelling moors fit to compare with the beauties even of Cumbria. The burns are thin compared with Perthshire's brawling torrents for here we are reaching the boundary of driest (in a meteorological sense) Scotland.

TAY RUNS BROWN

Off Dundee, the ferry steamers are staggering against the strong ebb-tide; the gulls are squalling; there are light cloud-puffs over the fields of Fife, and the river-front revels in sun and breeze. After hours of check, Tay runs down to the sea; the green haze of the tidal flood has departed. To most this is a mere incident of spring. To those who really know their river it is the last poor page of romance. The parchment is stained and sad, for Tay in its last stage drives out the mud of Perth and Dundee; it is merely a purifying sluice for the benefit of cities. I would rather recall Tay in happier hours and places, where the brown water is still pure and carries not one care of man. One April day we heard the infant Tay gurgling beneath the snow packs far up Ben Lui; in high summer we noted the spring gushing through the steep pyramid of scree which is the uppermost mountain. And almost every mile of Tay, from Ben Lui of high Caledonia to the sea beyond Arbroath is familiar.

Today Tay is brown with melting snow. The stream has gushed down ice-sheathed rocks and channels, welling here, bursting there. In a mile from the snows it is a strong flood, and the shepherds of Corinish are content to bide at home. The stones of the ford are often shouldered aside by the torrent. At dawn there is merely a feeble rattle in the river-bed,

but at noon the burn is striking shrewd blows, rising inches every hour. Late afternoon sees a spate rolling down the rocks, and the spray rises and glitters in the air.

In Strath Fillan there are many burns, some from high lochans, others from deep-seated springs on the hillsides, so that the river-flow is steadied. If all the rivulets came down with the floods of Corinish, there would be deluge in the long glen. To the first loch beneath Ben More, Tay or Dochart is still a riotous water, flooding, spilling and roaring, but gradually and surely ceasing to have the character of a mountain torrent. The dark brown of snow water and glaciated mud slowly turns into a stream wherein there is no more than heather hue, with yellow froth, swirling beneath the water breaks. The short quiet stretch of Loch Iubhair pauses the flow and clears the main current, but the glens and steeps of Ben More and Stobinian send down further roaring muddy torrents. I stand in the glen and watch the line of water, first dark against the white of snow, then silver among the brown of dead grass, the purple of shattered rock, and the sepia of birch twigs. It splashes, gushes, breaks, then hides away in some deep fold of the hills to jet forth afresh over the lower rocks and crash down to the Killin glen. At its spring Tay was a mountain hunter; in Glen Dochart it has become a clansman, a thrifty dweller among farms and meadows, but its ire can soon be roused. At a breath it goes roaring away down the rocks to Loch Tay, making a mile of cataracts in its haste.

In Loch Tay's 15 miles of soft level, the river loses most of its brown tinge, and much of its garrulity. Shortly Lyon and other streams bring direct from the folds of their lochless hills, the tribute of song and colour. And in the leagues beyond this, Garry brings down the song of the highlands of Atholl. Tay is now a mighty river, moving at majestic, unhurrying speed. The fine brown mud has no chance of settling in its pools and reaches. There is a rush ever seaward, and much smiting of high rocks and hard shingle. This Tay has not the infant treble heard in the meadows of Strath Fillan. It has the combined voice of a mighty host of waters, and so it sings a battle chant among the rock passes, many a soft requiem as it slides soberly past the cemeteries of Dunkeld and many a village. It croons a love song among the pine woods, and shouts the march of legions as it thunders down the long easy pitches among the rocks. A weir is a mere catch in the throat of Tay; the rumble of waters over a man-made obstruction is not the real song of the river.

And so, in the eventide, here comes Perth where Tay meets the check of the tide, and begins to feel the slackness of flat estuary waters. The last rivers to merge in its mass are douce, slow bodies with never a word to say for themselves. If they had music as rills, they have long lost the art and charm of expression in long flat canal-like reaches among the meadows of lower Perthshire. From Perth to Dundee the Firth of Tay is salt water most of the time, but now and again old Tay has an hour of its own, and the ebb is swept away beyond Arbroath. For an hour the

river-front has a fresh water, not a salt tang, and the ferry steamers stagger across against a heavy, heaving flood of brown.

ARBROATH AND MEARNS

From Arbroath northward the shore is divided between flat sandy links (on which the golfer disports) and rocky bay and towering headland. In winter this is a lovely haunt for the observer of wild Nature. The great line of migration passes down here from Iceland, the Scandinavian fjords and the Arctic steppes: ducks, geese, swans and their allies come over in mighty flocks, pause and pass, and with a telescope many happy hours may be spent watching their evolutions, their feeding, resting, playing. In spring, too, the coast, too, has its delight. At other times it is stormy, and I remember one great blast which sent spin drift for leagues inland blighting the evergreens with its clinging salt, rejuvenating the air over the fields, giving a pleasant tang to work there.

It is in higher Forfar that one gets the first characteristic "feel" of old, of proud Highland Scotland—a territory like none other on the face of the earth. The Border men of the southward merge comparatively slowly into the real Lowlanders, but beyond Dundee, and outside the fishing villages, there is a sharp bar between the Highlander and all others. Ethnologically, the contrast is very strong; there is a sharp distinction of cadence even in their "English" (by which I mean merely the book language they speak to Southron strangers), and even the manner of life on the farms and in the cottages is changed. For one point Nature is becoming less beneficent, and the harvest, ripening slowly, is wrested with ever greater toil from the land. In a day's wandering it is easy to pass from the barley lands and rich cow pastures to uplands where the thinnest of oats and rye are only grown under strict human protection and assistance.

So up through Montrose and into the Mearns, tramping through the remnants of pine forests and looking ever up to the long purple line of mountains, one wanders. The miles of farm land become merely a sweeping commonplace, but here and there the uniformity is broken by a deep furrow, a gorge in which some stream bickers down naked, smashed rocks. Personally I have a great love of such open sweeps of lands as the Mearns—places not thrilling with beauty but very pleasant homeland. In the storied spot, you have to live up to statuesque surroundings, but here on this shelf above the sea it is easy to relax mind and body. The farms are divided between oats and potatoes. Oatmeal makes the child into a man, the man into a hero, but the potato has again and again saved the nation from starvation without being regarded as heroic. This east side of Britain—Essex and Lincolnshire, Berwickshire and Fife, Forfar and the Mearns right up to Ross and Cromarty—is famous for seed potatoes. What healthier home can there be than the Mearns, the fields with the background of canopies of green pine needles, trunks of fiery red and behind these the snow-streaked Cairngorms. The stony shelves are even better for potatoes than the dry, high-lying plateaus of

the Andes where the crop was native and whence it was sent to Europe.

STOW, THE FISHER LAD

The fishing villages and hamlets alongshore from Arbroath right up to Aberdeen had in my earliest tramps a definite atmosphere of their own. Their stone-built piers and jetties, rugged yet strong as the iron cliffs and shore, were no more solid than the white walls of the fisher homes. Here and there was a bay in which wildfowl resorted, but mostly the seabirds were of the wilder, sea-living sort, lying out there among the reefs and skerries, diving, squabbling, screaming, ever with a sentry watching toward the danger (or food-debris) zone of land. Several nights I had spent off shore with the salmon fishers, shooting and picking up nets in the blue gloom, and watching the big sea-castles hurrying past, lights glowing and screws throbbing, on their lawful occasions. Here is a typical sketch from my diary, written for magazine publication many a year ago at a cottage window overlooking a tiny fishermen's harbour, and dealing with the son of a salmon netter:

"Stow was waiting: bare-footed, bare-headed, ragged of jersey and nondescript of trousering. My wife wished to see him, so he came shyly into the sitting-room. Not big for his ten years, but still thoroughly boyish with brown eyes and dark curly hair, Stow seems destined to follow the sea. At five years he 'stowed' away on the deep-sea trawler upon which his father then worked, and was discovered, sweetly asleep, when the boat was eight and twenty miles on her way towards the Northern fishing grounds. His father told me the story today, in the fine dialect of the Coast which I do not profess to write clearly or accurately. 'I had often promised to take him—when he was bigger'. He was all right with me on the boat, but I knew his mother would be raising all the village at home about him. We never sighted an inbound boat so that we might signal home news of his safeness—it was long before wireless came into existence—and it was early on Saturday morning when we got back. Straight home we went the minute our boat touched the quay. I rapped at the door, and my missus called out 'Who's that?' Young Jack here answered, as blithe as a linnet, 'You know jolly well who is is.' That was enough: she didn't wait to dress. His mother rushed down, grabbed him out of my arms, and off upstairs to snuggle him down in bed. She didn't ask if I'd had a good voyage, or even whether his clothes were mucky—and they were in a bonny mess.

"Tonight Stow had come to guide me to the salmon fishery. The MF 16 was waiting on the Yellow Sands, and the night tide had been turned a couple of hours. Our intention was to join the boat by a scramble along the scaur beneath the towering cliffs. The offshore salmon fishery is shared by many boats, and stations are open to the first comers. To the south of the estuary the fish are taken as they follow the sands; to northward shelf after shelf of rock stretches seaward, and along the outside boulders

the salmon feel their way to the river. The yellow sands fill a fissure between two rock-beds. It is a somewhat uncertain station, one day fishing from 40 to 50 big fish, the next being absolutely barren.

"We crossed the harbour sands, but at the first bight beyond the breakwater our path was blocked. Waves still boomed and churned against the foot of the cliff. Weird and wild was the scene. The ness of the first cove, and of a further, showed wan in the glow of the harbour beacons. All else was shadow, except to seaward. There under the starlight the heart of old Ocean could be seen heaving, great rollers were coming on and on, form a head and curve and break, and in a roaring torrent of spume strike the wet ledge. Then a rush, a door, and past our feet the white head of water drove into the dark dungeon of the cove to recoil with many a hiss and gurgle past our feet again. Clearly we were too early for a dry passage, but the fisherman who had been awaiting the arrival of Stow and myself, decided that the passage was fit for him. Discarding his heavy boots, he dropped down into the throat of the cove. I saw him clearly limned against the rushing white, then he leapt, was lost in the dark, and a wave threw a white duster over his foothold. In a few seconds he came into view again, on the edge of the rocks, high up, waiting, watching the swing of the breakers for the moment to leap to the floor of the next cove. Then he dropped out of sight.

"It was a half hour later that Stow thought we might venture, 30 minutes on a slippery breakwater, with the tide raging in front, throwing a long white ribbon against the cliffs. I confess to having some anxiety at facing the leaps which, though the tide had ebbed fairly well, were still necessary. The impending cliff, the dark caverns, the rocks and shales now hid in white, now isolated as the spent waves raced backwards, then sinking into unfathomable blackness ere the next roller came in. But at the water-level the light was better, and the dash to the first ness went easily. Here we paused, and Stow pointed out below a spit of sand on which the waves ran and which we must cross. 'Wait till the sand's near clear, then jump.' I did—and found the sand a yard nearer than I had anticipated. However with a stagger I got into the cove as the next wave broke. From this point there was no more difficulty—spits of sand and ledges of rock gave us fair pathway. It was a romantic walk—our track invisible in the shadows of the cliff, the echoing seas, the distant lights of seafaring, the black Ness which marks the boundary of this shore. Queries Stow—'Can you strike a match; father said I was to show a light as soon as we got in sight of the yellow sands.' After an ineffectual experiment on a pocket knife—how on earth did I, as a boy, conjure friction on a smooth blade—the match was lit; the tiny light flared up, then burnt out. There was no welcome gleam along the heaving flood. 'Try another,' said Stow and it was tried. Two lights replied—'the farther one to sea is our boat,' casually and accurately decided my little fisherman. We stepped on rapidly and again showed a flare. This time the boat was quite close. 'There she is,' said Stow, to whose keen eyes the darkness of sea and air

held no secrets, and he waded out to where she was awaiting us. My turn was more formal, pick-a-back on the sturdy junior fisherman, and in less than a minute the oars were quietly driving us through the water.

"Stow's father informed that one half of the net had been shot, and that we were pulling out to sea to drop the remainder. To avoid the 'bag' of the net we turned and I detected the line of cork-floats marking the net's position. About two hundred and fifty yards from shore the float marking the end of the sunken net was noted, and Stow's father prepared to shoot. A great perforated stone went overboard first as main anchor, then carefully fed (Stow at the float-end and his father with the leads) went over the dark brown net. It was now about 11.30; the scene one for an artist, a Rembrandt, rather than a writer. The dusky bodies of boy and man, their deft movements, the rustling of the net, the steady churning of the oars, the little spurts of phosphorescence as the blades dipped and pulled, the starlight so pure and glorious, the flowing wind, the heaving tide—colour not type should express the full message. Hardly a word was uttered, except as one passed into the ocean stream which sweeps round the Ness and the oarsman said as the boat swayed and curtseyed 'There's a bit o' an easterly jowl on.' At the end of the 'shot', the craft was anchored awhile—these great stones are preferred to iron by the fishermen for they rarely foul and are easily raised, lowered and replaced at little labour, if lost. Out on the northern offing, a procession of lights was passing; some green, some red, port or starboard or masthead lights. 'Do they ever come close to you,' I asked. 'Not when we're salmon fishing for we are always close to the rocks, but sometimes the herring and mackerel bring us quite into the line of steamers. Sometimes in a fog a big boat will blunder close inshore, and get stranded. Then there may be big pay for assistance. But that doesn't happen often.'

"Stow's father had been many years on steam trawlers, working at times from Iceland and the White Sea to the Bay of Biscay and the Atlantic fisheries, and many a tale he could tell of hard labour among those who go down to the sea in fishing vessels—of long hours when a full cod-end had to be cleaned and packed ere the next time (all too early) came to 'draw'; of nets to be repaired against time; of ships in danger from storm and collision yet working to the last moment in order to get a full boat in the allotted six days. He told of men mechanically keeping up the gutting of herring while their eyes were sealed in sleep—and of the fisher lasses equally inured to strain and hardship in the herring-sheds ashore; of days when sea and sky seemed one in ice and snow, when the nor'easter bit deep and shrewd through the thickest clothing.

"At the half hour past midnight the boat was turned inshore; the tide had ebbed almost to its limit, and this was the time for 'blashing'—beating the shallow so that the fish will rush from the shelter of the rocks and entangle themselves in the nets. Stow and the fishermen took out the

long poles as the boat curved over the net, into the narrow lane west of the rocks. Then they began, sending showers of drops in all directions. Stow's father at the oars kept the boat moving, calling out where he noted the silvery side of a startled salmon. To the end of the inner net we came, then the boat was turned, and the fisherman took the oars while Stow's father lifted the nets for finny spoil. The minutes passed without result. Then the man bent outward where the float swayed a little. 'A dab!' he said. 'Bad luck to take that on board first.' So the dab escaped. 'Here's something,' was the next ejaculation. A silvery tail flurried the water, then there was stillness. The father deftly cleared the net of its prey, handing a fine salmon to his son. 'That's good fish,' chuckled the youngster. In a short time there was another rattle of water as the net was drawn forward, but the fish escaped. Salmon will continue to thrust forward after they feel the meshes of the net, and by this means, in the case of a medium fish and a wide mesh, that many of them escape, working their way right through the yielding twines. 'Not a good start,' said our leader, 'we'll wait for the young flood before "blashing" any more.'

"Young Stow now found his father's coat, drew it over himself, curled up and went to sleep—snatched his usual night's rest, in fact, for lad-like, he declines to sleep while others play. A cool breeze was stirring along the water, but we had no need for extra covering. High over the black Ness, at regular intervals, came the gleam of a lighthouse, replied to less frequently by a vivid glare to the northward. The boat had to be kept off the rocks which the ebb had left. As the young flood came, the word was given to 'blash'—I took the sleeping boy's place. It seemed easy to strike the water with that long hazel stem. However, after a few strokes—much less resounding than those of the youngster—I felt a decided strain on my wrists, and a rick in the spine did not improve my comfort. A sound foothold seemed impossible, but I got a purchase against the side of the boat which aided further operations. 'Stop,' I obeyed. The oarsman backed a couple of strokes and reached out—a small silvery fish was struggling in the topmost meshes. 'A codling' was flung on the bottom boards, and 'blashing' was resumed. At the end of the first net, the oarsman gave the word to cease, and pulled the boat outwards. As we passed along I could not help noticing how skilfully the net had been shot: just off the big shelves of rock, yet leaving room for the accustomed passage of the fish. 'Shaft deep, see,' said the oarsman, a shaft being the full depth of a salmon net on this coast. At the seaward end the stone was again put over, and we waited. Night was fast merging into day—the fishermen watched with anxiety the paling of the stars in the dawn—half an hour's more dark would mean 20 fish at least in the net. Stow, his wee face pale against the pilot blue of the coat into which he had crept, slept peacefully. Now the cliffs, the foreshore, the off-standing rocks, were clear; the lights ceased to flicker in the sky; the stars dropped out as though the Eternal Hand had plucked them away to serve some other duty. 'Now, up with the net.' Softly moving was the

tide; the great throbs passed up unseen, unfelt, but not unheard—for the faint muffled drumming from shore was that of breakers.

"Carefully Stow was roused, to take his place at the cork-end of the net. I could not save him labour there as in the 'blashing'. Yard after yard, the brown net, wet, often slimy with weed, came back to my feet; the boat, stroke by stroke, drove landward. Sometimes a halt of the regular beat, a pause in our progress, while a crab was torn from its grip on the net, and, dismembered, flung into the sea; once a splash, a jerk and a fine coal-fish was plumped down. Two dabs, and that, were our only further catch. The net drawn home, the boat's head was turned for home, and soon after four we reached the flat calm of the harbour.

"Stow's disrepair of garments I now understood; sit for four hours on a wet thwart in a heaving boat, and even the strongest of cloth will show wear. Fishermen should wear leathern breeches at least!"

In the old sailing days, when each tiny port built and manned its own ships, this coast was sacred to whalers and other explorer-adventurers. It was the home of Arctic romance—and many were the tales of wild adventure told, from the lips of grandfathers, at the old open fires beneath the thatched roofs. From Montrose nearly to Stonehaven, the belt of fertile potato and live-stock farms narrows, and the Cairngorms become more prominent with every league. There is a succession of tiny ports—St. Cyrus, Johnshaven, Gourdon, Bervie. Beyond the latter the shore has a succession of sea-cliffs which at Fowlsheugh have a bold front of 200 feet. Then the country breaks away to Stovehaven, since 1607 the capital of Kincardineshire.

REGALIA'S ADVENTURE

Across the sandy bay to the south of Stonehaven, is Dunnottar Castle, founded on a stupendous insulated rock 160 feet above the sea eight or more centuries ago. The great square tower which is the most obvious part was constructed by the Crawfords, Earls of Moray, and has honoured place in Scottish history:

During the Wars of the Commonwealth, the Scottish regalia was kept here, and when the Castle was being besieged, the governor, George Ogilvie of Barras, held out strenuously, and did not surrender until they had been conveyed away, through the midst of the besieging force, by Mrs. Grainger, the minister's wife—the crown in her lap, the sceptre disguised as a distaff. The English General is said to have helped her into the saddle himself, quite unconscious of the treasure she had about her. She buried these under the pulpit of Kinneff church until the Restoration. At the union, the regalia was conveyed to Edinburgh, and almost forgotten until their discovery in 1816.

The siege began in September 1641, and the castle was not surrendered until the May following.

At the Restoration, all the persons connected with this affair were rewarded—Ogilvie was made a baronet; the brother of the Earl Marischal

was created Earl of Kintore; and Mrs. Grainger was given a sum of money.

In 1685 the castle was used as a prison for Covenanters, and the "Whig's Vault", in which they were confined, and in which many died, still remains. Dunnottar was dismantled soon after the Rebellion of 1715 on the attainder of its proprietor, James Earl Marischal. The area is about three acres, and the rock bears considerable resemblance to that on which Edinburgh Castle is built. The castle has recently been restored.

I have spent a clear summer night wandering outside the grand old castle, which the dusk seemed to touch into mystery rather than the majesty and grandeur of Edinburgh and Stirling Castles.

The Parliamentary commander, General Monk, was fully aware that the regalia was inside the castle, and inserted a clause about it in the terms of surrender. As viewed at Edinburgh Castle, the "jewels" are much bulkier than any load of household flax would be, and their weight would need a cart for the removal.

"In the churchyard of Dunnottar Walter Scott met for the first and last time Peter Peterson, the original of 'Old Mortality', cleaning the headstones at the graves of the Covenanters who died in the Castle."

Beyond Stonehaven a ridge of the far-away Grampians cuts right through to the sea at Girdle Ness. From this point, travelling northward, the great depression of Dee-side is reached; the land from Aberdeen to Aboyne, Ballater and Braemar beyond which is familiar to the reader of travel books. For 40 miles to the west of Silver City, the country is admirable. The wanderer whose taste is for drove roads seldom goes wrong up there. If you need a secret pass used by robbers through a morass-moor, a fragment of old Pictish way, there it is, if you use your eyes and feet. Look for the old passes by which the Highland folk passed easily and surely from their glens to the harvest of wheat and oats in Forfar, and you will find them. My fortune has been to reach folks at their cottages and farms, and find a welcome though the dust might be drifting in the hot July afternoon, or the way to the little inn groped through February's worst flurry of storm. To eyes accustomed only to Southern woodlands, dense hedges and green crops and pastures, the land lies bleak and stark to the north-easters, but where does the caller air shout more shrewdly for the heart-blood to leap and be joyful?

GUID SCOTS DRINK

Ale at one time was the Scots' tippie. Long before whisky was prominent, it was universally consumed. There were three kinds, the small, the household, and the strong, but the second was the most usual—it was the "tipenny" commemorated in the Act of Union, and sung of by Allen Ramsey and Fergusson and Burns. For three centuries however whisky has been increasingly a Scots drink: here are some ribald rhymes:

Wi' tipenny we'll fear nae evil,
Wi' usquebagh we'll face the devil.

Or you can have it soldier fashion :

Bring a Scotsman frae his hill,
Lay in his cheek a Highland gill,
Say, "Such is royal George's will,
And there's the foe!"
He has no thought but how to kill
Twa at a blow.

Or if you prefer a more ancient reference, let it be :

Fairshon had a son who married Noah's daughter,
And nearly spoilt the Flood by drinking up ta water,
Which he would have done, I verily believe it,
Had ta mixture been only half Glenlivet.

Of the virtues of Scots drink, an experienced toper explained: "Whusky makes ye drunk afore ye are fou', but yill makes ye fu' before ye are drunk."

Atholl brose is whisky with honey, taken as a morning dram. It is a powerful and indigestible mixture, and no one but a Highlander engaged in active outdoor work can tackle it regularly. Why Atholl should be claimed above other districts is not clear. In his book *In Scotland Again* Mr. H. V. Morton gives the following recipe from Blair Athol :

Take a pound of liquid honey, put in a basin, add half a pint of water and stir until they are mixed. The spoon must be a silver one. Then add, very slowly, a pint and a half of whisky. Stir until a froth rises. Bottle the mixture securely and let it keep.

This potion, I am assured, is, like John Peel's "View Holloa", calculated to awaken the dead.

"You can use oatmeal instead of honey," I was told, "and some like to beat up the yolk of an egg with the brose."

In *A Guide to the Beauties of Scotland*, published in 1799, the Hon. Mrs. Murray of Kensington, who had traversed much of Scotland in her own coach, had something to write about Athol brose. "To a lover of whisky it is a delicious treat, and much prized by the people of Atholl, having good reason, I suppose, for so doing. One instance of its efficacy I will mention: the daughter of an inhabitant of Atholl, having been placed at one of the finest boarding schools in Edinburgh, was seized of a violent fever. Her father was sent for, as she was thought to be in great danger; and upon his arrival being told that his child was on the point of death, and that everything the physician could do for her had been done without effect, he earnestly explained: 'But has she had any Atholl Brose?' 'No.' He then had a good dose of it instantly prepared, and making her swallow it, she at once recovered."

PLACE OF OTTERS

Away north again in Aberdeenshire trout streams ripple down long moorland shelves, with here and there a slack, a pool, a gurgling water-break; mightier salmon rivers growling their bass against dark rock cliffs, and then the dancing blue of tidal waters. To the wanderer all these are pleasant memories. My wayward mind recalls the shrieking of a winter storm, through which at intervals loomed beneath snow-clouds a veritable hell of waves crashing, smashing, leaping—and behind all the clash and roar was the war-song sinister yet rousing, from the invisible sea wolves, the Bullers of Buchan, where many ships have been wrecked. And next it is a summer vision of the pool of otters, a tiny nook next the estuary of a pretty stream. "The place of otters!" ejaculated the old coast-dweller when I described the deep rock-stream where river and sea mingle. I had walked along the multi-coloured sands of the bay, past the forsaken kelp-burners' furnace-hearth, past the strong spring in which wavered the silver cord blessed so long ago by hermit and saint, and over boulders crusted with tiny limpets and slippery with tangle and bladderwrack. At last, scrambling over a bridge of great rock masses beneath which could be heard the hiss and suck of the tide, a tiny, almost silent, cove was reached, of which the rock-pool was to me the great feature. How many fathoms of water flood this rock-trench is unknown. Homely experiments fail to find bottom, and it may be deep indeed.

On a still summer evening a family of otters is in undisputed possession, or if the tide is full there may be a pair of seals or porpoises as well. All these are alike attracted by the mingled fish-life in the brackish pool, but the broken sea-cliffs beyond are always a secure retreat from the land-folk. At dawn or ebb the seals will plunge away to some sloping ledge on a distant skerry, but the porpoises may drowse away the full forenoon, their shining pig-bodies rolling and dipping with every pulse of the deep.

There are no more playful creatures along the shore than young otters. I have watched four of them swimming races for a fragment of floating stick, and the mimic frenzy with which the later-comers pursued the victor, now leaping, now plunging, now a veritable turmoil in which heads and tails and splashing legs and lissom dripping bodies writhed and twisted and struggled. Or a floating leaf or patch of foam might draw attention: the little creatures would reconnoitre, skilfully sink out of sight, and rise again, swimming now with nose and eyes only visible, cleaving the surface so cautiously as to make scarcely a ripple. Or in more grim sport the little party hurled themselves on fat eel already mortally mangled by the teeth of their parents. The wee eyes blazed, the sharp teeth rend fragments from the quivering carcase, they dive to seek sweet rending from the softer underparts, fight for the vantage points at throat and fin-joints. It is otter nature thus to tease and mutilate any large prey within their power. To witness such frolics it is necessary to sit close. Never does mother lead forth her young until the air has been carefully snuffed and the keen, beady eyes ranged over the pool and its surroundings.





Porpoise or seal seem to be regarded as enemies as much as man. Even when the coast is "all clear", the vigilance is not relaxed.

This north-east corner of Aberdeenshire—Buchan—seems little known outside golfers and anglers, which is a pity. There is much interesting country, lonely inns, solitary tracks, great swelling moorlands, shallow corries, and deep bogs, where the curlew and the plover, the snipe and the dunlin dwell securely. There are stories and legends for those who have ears to hear. Strange it is that so few advocate the glories of a perfect ear as an asset in holiday enjoyment. It must be entrancing to others more divinely blessed in that way than myself to turn on a mental record of Devonshire burr, or Connaught drone, the singing tones of the Welsh, the deep roar of the half-Norse coastmen from Flamborough to Kinnaird Head, to hear again the thin factory-Lancashire, the baritone of the Yorkshire wolds and moor men, the soft murmur of the Gael, and the excited staccatos of the Celt. Magnificent indeed must it be to lean back and let swell through the chambers and passages of that innermost secret brain a flow of the rick folk-talk of wilderness Britain.

The long glens shelving down to Moray Firth are famous wanderer country. The great rivers Deveron, Spey, Findhorn, Ness, Beaully, Conon, Shin, Brora, with their many straths and moors and forests and corries, their lochs and lochans, their waterfalls and estuaries are linked with the supreme glory of Northern Scotland. Some are rivers of the wilderness throughout: others brawl, bicker and sloom through the haunts of men, turning watermills, tolerating road and railway bridges, and finally clearing their own throats of sand and mud and debris as they sweep out to mingle with the deep blue firth.

In other chapters I will deal with the distant bens, lofty passes and deep glen troughs, with their hefty torrents. There is enough here of lower land to satisfy the wanderer—particularly if he or she is lucky enough to reach this part when the claims of sport, of game preservation, or persistent bad weather close the higher country.

Charles St. John wrote most of his glorious sporting and nature pages about this Moray Firth; Hugh Miller, the stonemason of Cromarty, went into its geology and traditions. It is curious how much nature study in the North owes to the amateur and working man. In his staid yet enchanting Victorian fashion Samuel Smiles has told the life-stories of bakers and shoe-makers, weavers, and other humble characters who did splendid service linking with their narratives scientific research attempted under tremendous difficulties.

MORAY FIRTH COAST

At the outset the great bight of Northern Scotland has a rocky shore from Peterhead through Fraserburgh, Macduff and Banff. The breaks in these are mostly where inland streams can no longer be denied access to the mighty sea. The people are fisherfolk rather than farmers and shepherds. The cliff paths are not easy, nor yet continuous, and the under-

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Mull from Dun I, Iona

Photo by W. Thomson]

cliffs are pretty exciting. To creep up a long, steep and wet slab out of the way of a rising tide is an experience not greatly approved or repeated. For many a year my best love was for the climbing of rocks. Along the shore this is a gamble. The sea-cliffs are undercut for the most part. The lower portions exposed to wave action at every tide and capful of wind are washed smooth and rounded. Above this is a more or less definite overhang, usually of harder stone, badly fractured and liable to rain down tons of rock at the touch of a man's fingers. Not until these two zones are passed is there likely to be a ledge sound enough for hold or broad enough for rest. Quite often, in glaciated areas, there is another zone of stiff boulder clay, more or less imbedded with rounded river cobbles, and only attackable by means of a pick-axe or ice-axe—implements scarcely like to be in the possession of an undercliff wanderer. Moreover sea-cliffs rarely offer sporting climbs as to their upper terraces, and folds are usually so weathered and ice-cracked that the face is in a state of tottering ruin. Yet I used to be taken up sporting climbs in some sea-cliffs near Aberdeen; there are other suitable rocks about Zennor Cove in Land's End (Cornwall) and about some of the minor Channel Islands.

On the sandy coast are little lochs like Spynie, with all the possible wealth of nature and wild sport. West of Elgin the coast becomes entirely a belt of drifted sand, of salt marsh, haunt for diving and reed birds rather than for the surface feeders which take their toll of small fish off Cullen or Portsoy or other rock-girt port. The wild geese and swans, hustled out of Norway by creeping ice, come here in great crowds in winter; nor in summer are they entirely absent, being then represented by immature bachelor youngsters. A few wild geese continue to breed in quietest Sutherland—a mere relic it appears of the hosts which formerly nested far down into Scotland and even, if ancient records are not incorrect, into Northern England.

Deveron, Spey, Findhorn, Nairn—great and splendid rivers—give the wanderer leagues of beauty, for roads and paths and lanes, inns and farms stretch far inland. It's glorious country when spring makes her onrush to the fields and forests, and again when the frost rime touches the dim barriers of hills and sends the fiery cross of autumn across the foothills and the lower glens. The only time when Morayshire fails is during a long summer drought, when the rivers run low, and the pastures are grey and listless. But it must not be overlooked that the area round Nairn is among the driest in Britain. Its rainfall averages some 26 inches per annum. This may be due to the long ridge of the Grampians stretching across the south and diverting the heavy rain-clouds which have survived the granite teeth of the western mountains of Lochaber.

DAWN ON THE CAIRNGORMS

Every week hundreds of persons are carried across the Cairngorm passes in the night mail train, but mostly they are asleep until Inverness is near at hand. By that time the mountains are far behind and scarcely

noticeable. A nature-lover cannot rest on such a journey; as the train pulls up the long incline toward Drumochter, he is on the alert for the sight of Loch Garry, which in the half light is clear as a mountain jewel or dull blue or green with reflected cloud shadow.

On the pass itself stags and hinds are feeding alongside the quiet motor-road, and as the stations with honey-sweet names pass there is the sleepy crow of a grouse-cock. Then comes Loch Ericht and Dalwhinnie. Up into the dim night the larks begin to soar and to sing. They will meet the new day high above the mountain tops. About Kingussie the roar of the train disturbs a grey heron which has been putting in a little early fish-spearing. The bird lifts itself on to its toes, then sweeps the great wings, and we lose sight of it among the birches above the course of Spey. In spring the guard has shown me golden eagles low down the valley, and once I heard their yelp as the train stopped at some wayside signal. Now they are away at their nesting eyries among the cliffs and corries.

The Spey is quite a big stream before the real glory of the Cairngorm peaks comes into view. The north wall of the mighty plateau is trenched with passes and scooped with glens and corries. This morning there is a ruffle of mist along the hill-tops, a shadow of pearl behind the great lilac buttresses. As day nears, this ruffle, this shadow, disappears. The great forests of Speyside are no longer mere dull and formless blocks, but wave beyond wave, ridge beyond ridge, of rose-stemmed Scots firs, green spruces and golden-green larches.

As the minutes pass, the light rapidly grows. The meadows and moorland below the forest become clear to the eye. The sun is still below the horizon, and even the tiny fluffs in the vault are scarcely touched with the first fires of day. Westward, the sky is deep blue, with just a twinkle of the declining morning star; in the north, over Morayshire and the flat sea, there is still the strong primrose touches of the night glow. In Cairngorm Scotland, summer evening and dawn come close together, but not so closely as to confuse the hours observed by the larks.

Suddenly there is a burst of thrush music; then the blackbirds, the starlings and wee birds begin their song of welcome to the day. Rooks, however, have been astir—yes, I also wonder if they do not caw and sing in relays all through the night.

Even in June there are white snow patches near the crests of the highest peaks, and as we watch from the carriage windows, one of these gradually turns red, then gold. It has caught the first glimpse of day. Soon the light begins to slide down the mountains, here touching a ridge into prominence, there drawing a veil across some secret cove of the night. Round us the forest seems to rejoice, to throw out its richest resins, to burnish the blue, green and gold of tree-tops, to flash back a silver message from the dashing streams. Clear is the sky, bright is the east with day; the birds sing ever more fully and briskly; and in a few minutes the mystery of the night has passed, and full day has come to the forest and the flowering meadows around us.

Not such, however, are all nights on the Cairngorm line; we have crossed the pass to the Spey when rain has drummed audibly against the carriage windows and roofs, when all the peaks and sky, forest and glen were lost in mist, and when day itself stole into existence as a pale and frightened ghost, or when the frost red of the east was reflected by a world of shining ivory peaks, each taking its colour from the sky, and becoming ethereal, dream-like, impossible above the winter-touched bars of forest trees. Moonlight rather cheats the traveller expectant of a wondrous dawn, where shadows are suddenly glorified and day comes as a warrior clad in gold and with a sword of red or rose.

HISTORIC INVERNESS

Inverness is a historic place which attracts the wanderer between trains. In September 1921 Mr. Lloyd George held a Cabinet meeting in the Town Hall there to consider "urgent business" in the shape of Mr. de Valera's reply to negotiations for the separating of Eire from the rest of the Ireland governed by the British. "Had Dail Eireann several centuries ago sent representatives of similar temper and with republican demands to the Government they would have been met in a very different fashion than they can expect today. Instead of carrying back a civil reply they would have lost their heads, as the story of the old Northern capital demonstrates."

In 1427 King James I of Scotland summoned a memorable Parliament in the Castle of Inverness, situated but a short walk from the modern Town Hall. The condition of the most northern parts of his realm was continually disturbed, and the monarch felt powerful enough to consider methods of enforcing order. According to one record, the turbulent chiefs of Ross, Sutherland and Caithness came in under "safe conducts", but the first question of Parliament was complete submission to King James. Three of the chiefs claimed the right of independence, and, for their temerity, were promptly executed.

Another record claims that the entire band of northern chiefs was arrested by order of the King and punished for rebellion, three suffering the extreme penalty. Among others, the greatest of the Macdonalds (Alexander, Lord of the Isles) was imprisoned until the southward departure of the King. On release his first act was to raise 10,000 men in the west, over-run the eastern straths, and burn the castle and Royal burgh of Inverness. This exploit brought back the King with a strong army, and Alexander was followed into Lochaber. Here his forces were surprised and destroyed, their leader narrowly escaping with his life, and giving submission two years later to the King.

In 1562 Queen Mary paid a visit to Inverness, but the castle declined hospitality. It was however, taken by force, and the governor hanged. During the Civil Wars Montrose and his opponents in turn took the place. Oliver Cromwell built a new stronghold near the firth. The old castle was finally blown up by the clansmen under Prince Charlie in 1746,





and on its site was been built the handsome castellated building of the Court House, County Buildings, etc. Cromwell's fort was demolished at the Restoration, but a considerable part of the rampart is still recognisable in the neighbourhood of the airport.

About 1730 Captain Thomas Burt, an engineer officer concerned in the finishing of General Wade's Highland road system, wrote some home truths of Inverness:

The Town Hall is a plain building of rubble, and there is only one room in it, where the magistrates meet upon the town's business, which would be tolerably handsome, but the walls are so rough, not white-washed, or so much as plastered; and no furniture in it but a table, some bad chairs, and altogether immoderately dirty.

The new Town Hall, which was opened in 1882, is a handsome Gothic building, of which the chief apartment (presumably that in which the historic Cabinet meeting was held) is a large and lofty assembly room. The fourteen great windows lighting this are embellished each with the arms of an important clan with local connections and habitations.

At the door of the Town Hall is a strange blue lozenge-shaped stone called Clach-na-Cudainn, or "stone of the tubs" from having served as a resting-place on which the women, in passing from the river, used to set down the deep tubs in which they carried water. It is reckoned the palladium of the town (Sir Walter Scott called it "the charter stone of the burgh"), and said to have been carefully preserved after the town had been burned by the Lord of the Isles in 1429—the expedition which brought from the King the sentiment:

Let God but grant me life, and there shall not be a spot in my dominions where the key shall not keep the castle, and the furze bush the cow; though I myself should lead the life of a dog to accomplish it.

The Royal burgh of Inverness is the only considerable town north of the Grampians, having some 22,582 inhabitants. The high-echoing names of Nairn and Beauly, Fortrose and Dingwall, Tain and Cromarty, Dornoch and the like are little more than straggling villages, with a few small county buildings in which the King's business is transacted. In such places the most considerable class is the "merchant" who buys agricultural produce and fish and retails food and other necessary supplies. Manufactures are practically non-existent.

The fortress of Inverness was ever key to the North. No considerable expedition passed north or south without forcing its stronghold or "containing" the garrison from playing havoc in the rear. Its establishment is definitely ancient. Macbeth had a castle here, of which Shakespeare's Duncan says:

This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air
Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
Unto our gentle senses.

And succeeding Scottish monarchs either held grip, or added to the fortifications which commanded the seaward ford of the River Ness. Sieges, however, came every generation; sometimes the fortress was stormed; at others abandoned by treachery or starved into surrender. Often its gaunt walls and disciplined garrison held out against the fiery stream of clan warfare until relief, either by diversion of interest or arrival of supplies and reinforcements, came about.

In 1742 Captain Thomas Burt tells us that he saw a man hanged at Inverness in so bungling a manner that he felt for the prolonged sufferings of the unfortunate criminal. But he philosophises, "how could it be otherwise, when the hangman was eighty years old, and had not learned his trade for want of practice?" A century later the police superintendent at Inverness declared that crime there was very rare, and the hangman's office as great a sinecure as it was in Captain Burt's time.

TARTAN

Tartan was made from the wool of the mountain sheep in many designs and colours, which varied with the clan's skill at the looms and resources in dyed material. The patterns had to be suitable for weaving warp and woof on the simple handlooms. Traditionally there was a series of eight colours, of which all were used for clergy and the services of the altar; seven for the king and so on down to the single dyed garment of the *cumerlagh* or serf. Of these colours, deep yellow was produced from the bog myrtle; black from elder twigs and fresh alder shoots; green from heather tops; foxglove and also lily were used to produce clear yellows.

Far more important were the dyes produced from the lichens of rocks and trees. "Crottle" and "staneraw" lichens yielded their secrets by producing rich dyes in reaction to ammonia—scarlet, purple, yellow, russet and green. Neither to stone or tree is the slow growth of lichen other than a benefit. It protects the stone surface from corrosion and waste by carbonic acid, and aids the back of the other by shielding it from frost and heat. It is the birthright of trees to afford foothold for the "corticle" section of lichens. The lichen is no parasite: it needs a foothold and no more, drawing its nutrition from the sun and rain of Heaven. Yet the Highlanders, scraping them from the rocks and trees, find that they contain iron, oil, salt, resin, starch and many other chemical agents. The chemists' litmus to detect acids and alkalis is extracted solely from some species of *Rocella* and *Lecanore*.

GLORIOUS GLENS

The Glens which incline eastward to the Inverness coast are among the most glorious in Britain. There is Affric and Conon; there is Urquhart and Morriston which come in by way of the River Ness; there is Strathfarrar and Cannich—proverbs in glens, beautiful and remote enough for the wanderer. The great glen which slits across Scotland here, with its deep lochs of Ness and Lochy, is always worth a tramp, but yet I never love a

canal. To the engineer, the locks and other works may have beauties, and deepened waters lie ultra-still, but such quiescence is not natural. However, it's not worth while quarelling:

Glen More (the Great Glen) can be seen without realising the existence of the century-old Caledonian Canal. The lochs of Garry and Quoich and Arkaig, of Cluanie and Loyne show the best lines of travel. Indeed to me the great glen has always been an excellent place to cross (from the tracing an old drove road from Craig Inn near Loch Carron, or by General Wade's road which traversed from Glen Moriston and went south over Corrieyarrick Pass). I never intend to traverse it on foot from Inverness through Fort Augustus to Fort William. There is a pretty variation from the Moray Firth, crossing from Inverness by Culloden Moor to the River Nairn, and following this stream and various lochans to Foyers and then across the loch of Ness and west by Glen Urquhart to Affric and then over the passes either to Glen Shiel or to Killilan. Or the route may be from the Spey across the old Corrieyarrick Pass direct to Fort Augustus at the head of Loch Ness, following on with a free-and-easy wander to Cluanie Inn among the lonely bens, by road to Glen Shiel, or over the deer forests by "rights-of-way" to Loch Affric and back by the pleasant Strath Glass to Beauly. Yet a third fine crossing is that from Loch Laggan to Glen Roy, and then north by a side-glen to Invergarry, where the long glen strikes west by Loch Garry and Quoich to Kinloch-hourn on the western sea. Or down Glen Roy to Spean Bridge and Gairloch from which the track westward goes on the north side of Loch Arkaig and up the lovely Glen Dessary to Loch Nevis. These are but few of the fine routes across the great furrow which divides the true Highland country from that of the Grampians.

The days of travel mentioned above demand patience and marching skill; you must know, and never guess, when your strength will give out. The inns are irregularly dotted about the map, and in the sporting seasons—which may be either salmon, trout, deer or grouse, or the whole four together or in varying combinations—may be overcrowded. Sometimes there is no available cottage of ghillie or keeper, and as the "lodges" are sacrosanct, the alternative is either an arduous tramp or a night among the heather or under the pines. There is little real discomfort in sleeping out on a calm, bright summer night; or even in one of warm rain. But however cannily a night's shelter can be improvised or take it out in the open, the food problem is awkward. If bivouac there must be, take the road again after a good evening meal—as much as you can eat—with provision for a big breakfast at dawn. Up and about at four in the morning in the fine Highland air, there is need for food long before the hotel cook is on duty. Rations are essential to the enjoyment of bivouacs among the Highland glens.

It would be a mistake to assume that Strathpeffer Spa dominates the glens which go down to Cromarty Firth, or that the comparatively tame strath followed by the railway to Kyle of Lochalsh by any means typifies

its beauties. The lover of Nature may find much of the interest in the Black Isle to the south of Cromarty Firth, and in contrasting Fortrose with the ancient fisher town of Cromarty.

OLD RED SANDSTONE

Hereabouts I came across a geologist who asked me to be grateful to our Old Red Sandstone, which has made a great anchorage here. "Well," he said (twiddling the hammer with which he had been clinking fossils), "I won't go so far as to say that its geology has made Britain nucleus fit for a mighty Empire. But I would like to claim that one certain rock-formation has furnished us with our best Naval harbours. Its absence across the North Sea has left Germany with a coast embarrassed with shoals and mudbanks, where harbours have to be dug and dredged at great trouble. Yes, Britain has the Old Red Sandstone. It is a rock which scours away rapidly and cleanly under water, and where it meets the sea usually forms a deep and clean anchorage. Take Scapa Flow in the Orkneys. Here has been dissolved out of a basin fringed with rocky islands, and there is a safe haven, though the Orkney tidal currents are about the wickedest in the oceans.

"Here is Cromarty Firth, a crescent nineteen miles long and about five wide, entered by a narrow sound between granite cliffs. Safe shelter at all times and in all weathers. As at Scapa Flow, the navies of the world could lie here in safe shelter through the wildest gale that ever blew. Next there is the basin at Montrose, a great lake closed from the sea by a narrow belt of rock-covered sandhills. The Firth of Tay is just another of the typical Old Red Sandstone harbours, and so is the Firth of Forth, with Rosyth harbour. Then down the North Sea coast there is little of Old Red, and few naval harbours which do not require a heavy annual expenditure on works, dredging and such like.

"The only other harbour of the Old Red series that I can bring to mind is that of Milford Haven, in Wales."

For my part I prefer to wander the little glens from Novar and similar points reaching out in the direction of Ben Wyvis. The last typical glen of this series takes a long, long trail by the Black Water and the Schalachie right out to Strathcarron.

PEAKS IN WESTER ROSS

Though almost continuously deer forest, with few roads and inns, the western district of Ross-shire has many interesting ridges and splendid buttress climbs. The bare sandstone and quartzite of Torridon and other zones makes striking colour contrasts with the blue shields of lochs, with the blue-green and rose of pines, with the bronze of heath, red of fern and brown of coppice and larch. From the famous centre of Kinlochewe, Ben Eighe is a great feature, the range rising at five points over 3000 feet above sea level; Slioch, 3262 feet, has an irregularly dome-shaped, storm-shattered head, and Liathach rises to 3456 feet. Farther north, toward

Dundonnell, An Teallach range rises again and again nearly to 3500 feet. This has been described by an English climber as "apart from rock-climbing, the ridges of Teallach are finer than any in the British Isles outside Skye". The inn at Dundonnell guards the northern gate of the maze of tumble mountains next the Hebridean shore. According to Mr. Arthur Gardner, the eminent mountain photographer: "If I were asked to name the wildest and grandest mountain on the mainland of Scotland I should give the palm to An Teallach (the Challick)."

Ben Eighe is one of the most remarkable peaks in Scotland, its upper structure being composed largely of quartzite which falls away in white screes far down the ridges giving it the appearance of a snow mountain, or as the poet (Principal Shairp) puts it of an aged sea-eagle:

Benyea, magnificent Alp,
Blanched bare, and bald, and white,
His forehead, like old sea-eagle's scalp,
Seen athwart the sunset light.

It is a wonderful peak with mighty corries striking deep into its ridges. Chief of these is Coire Mhic Fearchair, which has been described as surely the finest rock-scene in Britain. Sail Mhor is the peak above, and the crags rise in sublimity while to the east the buttresses are an "uncompromising perpendicularity". The ben is also defended by uncompromising loose screes.

Liathach, 3456 feet, too is wonderful. After a perfect Easter day of climbing some mountaineers have placed on record the glory of a chilly evening with great streamers of the aurora borealis flashing over the crest of the mountain, shooting right up to the zenith in many coloured hues. Liathach is a glorious peak, and the great poet of the Highland West has written of it:

Liaguch, rising sheer
From river-bed up to the sky,
Grey courses of masonry, tier on tier,
And pinnacles splintered on high!

Slioch, 3262 feet, is near Loch Maree, a fine cone highest to the west, and the ridge presents no particular difficulty, being mostly grass with no particular rock-cliffs.

Every peak has its own character. The hills of Torridon stand apart, and with a distinct individuality, and yet not in complete isolation. The pearl-grey of the quartz-crowned hills at sunrise, and the ruddy towers of sandstone, mirrored in the crimson-dyed lochs at sunset, together with the steep terraced moorland, split by deep-set torrents, have the fascination peculiarly their own. Easter weather may be very wild near the Atlantic, or it may be merely fitful with rain on the lower ground and snow above. Yet between squalls there may be clear view for a couple of hours with

magnificent rainbows, and a peak bursting through the smother of cloud. It's the weather that makes the sport or mars it.

MONTROSE'S LAST CAMPAIGN

I have not yet finished with Ross-shire for about Carbisdale Castle, near Dornoch Firth, the Marquis of Montrose, in 1650, waited for the Covenanting forces which were coming to the attack. The Marquis had assembled ships and men in Orkney—500 Danes and Germans of some military experience and 1000 Orcadian levies, with sufficient soldiers of fortune to train them, and enough gentlemen on horses to make a cavalry of 40 to 50. Sir John Hurry, with 500 of the best, crossed Pentland Firth in advance of the Marquis, went past Wick, and secured the narrow pass, Ord of Caithness, through which the road goes to the south. Montrose landed near Duncansby Head on April 12, 1650, dashed through Thurso, and marched south to join Hurry at the Ord. Dunrobin Castle, two days later, had to close its gates, but the force was too slight to assail it. The Marquis then turned up Strathfleet, where the railway track is now laid, and reached Lairg on the 23rd. From Lairg, owing to spring floods, the hill road was taken to Rosenhall in Strath Oyckell. Here he was told that only the enemy in Ross was one troop of horse, and he went into camp at Carbisdale on the south side of the river, waiting some Mackenzies and other clans to come to join the Royal Standard from the west.

On hearing that Montrose was astir in Caithness, Strahan, the Parliamentary commander in Ross, mustered five troops of horse (220 in all), 36 musketeers, and 400 Monroes and Rosses at Tain, and marched westward. Montrose was then encamped at Carbisdale, behind a line of trenches and breastworks. On April 27 Major Lisle, with Montrose's 50 horse, rode out to disperse what Strahan intended them to believe was a solitary troop; the other troops came out of concealment, and Lisle's sudden retreat threw Montrose's camp into confusion. Scores of untrained Orcadians were drowned in the flooded Kyle, or cut down by Strahan's horse. Sir John Hurry, 58 officers and nearly 400 men were captured. Montrose (who had his horse shot under him) was compelled to turn his face on the lost field, toward the trackless wilderness of the west.

With two others (Sinclairs) he fared into the unknown, hoping to reach friendly clans, but deviating far from a straight line; there were few huts for shelter; no roads, no paths, deep bogs, violent streams and heavy rain. In desperate condition for lack of food, they parted and Sir Edward Sinclair, the Orcadian, was never heard of again. Montrose struggled to Glascoyle sheiling, and was hidden from searchers by the shepherd in occupation there. Then he wandered into the storm, was met by a man, and soon Neil Macleod of Ardvreck received the famishing Marquis from him. On the evening of the 30th the Marquis was detained, and on May 4 the Parliamentary emissary arrived, taking the captive first to Skibo, and thence to Edinburgh where he was hanged. Ardvreck's blood-money was to be 25,000 pounds Scots, of which 20,000 were to be paid in coin,

and the rest in oatmeal for his clan. The money was never paid, and two-thirds of the accursed meal was sour. Ian Lom's final verse is vindictive and triumphant:

Death-wrapping to thee, base one!
Ill didst thou sell the righteous,
For the meal of Leith
And two-thirds of it sour!

At various times I have followed Montrose's route among the towns of Caithness and Sutherland, and wandered a good deal about Strath Oykell, mostly in the early months before grouse nest and hind let fall their calves, before forest and moor is closely guarded.

ARCTIC POACHING

At Bonar Bridge the county of Sutherland is entered—the wildest and loneliest area in Britain with east shore washed by the North Sea, the north by the Arctic Ocean and the west by the Atlantic. In one year of no account the whim seized me to gloat over those famous pools of Sutherland where Charles St. John drew his early salmon, and just after the New Year I reached Arctic Scotland. At such a time "fush" is the only subject talked about in an "early" district. Travelling modestly, using wayside inns, I had many a crack with red-faced ghillies and got insight into methods by which "genuine Scotch salmon" may reach city shops a few hours after the season opens on Pentland Firth. "There's such an one in Thurso, or Inverness, that can always put a few fush quietly through."

In other quarters the poaching yarns were too enthusiastic to be relegated to the distant past. There might be men in the low-ceiled kitchen with socks wet from a foray with torch and fish-spear at some shallow where ice tinkled in every wave and fringed every rock, or who had, on the edge of that stormy night, drawn a net across some pool near the tideway.

The most desperate poacher I met was a mild-mannered gentleman who easily confessed to the crime of illicit fish-taking in early youth—he was just out of gaol for hammering two ghillies who had taken too keen an interest in his pedlar's pack. "In the old-time there was some poaching here. I remember my father standing by the waterfall with a long gaff and snatching the fish as they jumped past. He didn't often miss one, but fell down one flood-day and was drowned. And there's holes in the rock where a man might lift one or two which had dropped back from the top rush of water. But everything's too watched now. The salmon's no guid to Sutherland. A wheen hotels and the lairds get all the money—and and they spent it outside the county.

"There was a time when the pools hereabouts were juist paved wi' fush, and a net would bring out enough to feed the town for a' winter. But we durst not touch one of these sacred fush although the bairnies are

hungering. There's nae spunk among men who let their bairns and women starve in the midst of such plenty.

"The minister says that poaching's no a guid turn, so we mustn't touch spear or net. But there's still some as canna be stoppit. They want poachin' to be a bit of a ploy, the divvils, and if they were deid they wad likely poach in Heaven's own streams.

I picter him at gloamin' tide,
 Steekin' the back door o' his hame,
 And hastin' to the waterside,
 To play again the auld, auld game,
 And syne wi' saumon on his back,
 Catch't clean against the heavenly law,
 And heavenly byliffs on his track,
 Gaun linkin' doon some heavenly shaw."

The verse of John Buchan is not of the old poacher with the poll of Arctic white, but the sentiment's "aye the same".

NORTHERNMOST BENS

Facing the Arctic across Pentland Firth, Sutherland has three mountains, of which Ben Hope, 3040 feet, is the highest. This is the most northerly "Munro" or summit over 3000 feet in Scotland or the British Isles. If it were not so remote, the mountain would not be regarded as difficult. The east side is the easier, starting from Tongue, and following various rising corries with large lochans. The western slope is steep, the massif rising in two big pitches, the first wooded, and the second from the 1000 feet contour practically to the top rocky with many buttresses. Tongue, by the easier eastern slope and Kinloch Lodge, is 14 miles from the summit. In the Hope Valley, public services are not available, but the way from Cashil Dhu farm is nearest of all. Pentland Firth, the Arctic Ocean, Orkneys, the flats of Caithness and the Sutherland peaks make up the view, which so far I have never seen. I have more than once tried to get quarters at Cashil Dhu, but did not succeed. Sutherland mountains do not form ranges like those in some parts of the south Highlands. They are detached masses, rising separately in positions scattered throughout the limitless wasteland. From any one of the great mountains most of the others are visible. The moorlands appear all the more dreary owing to the lack of trees and of variety in the plant life. Heather, coarse grasses, cotton grass and deer's hair moss make up a great part of the moorland vegetation, while in some of the corries of the high mountains beautiful Alpine flowering plants are found. At times patches of other plants occur to break the dreary uniformity of the moors.

Ben Loyal, 2504 feet, towers high over everything to the north and east. Ben Hope, six miles away, is the nearest rival, with Clibrek, 12 miles to the south. The ascent of Ben Loyal goes easiest from Tongue where





there is a good road service to Lairg station through Altnaharra. The cloudberry grows in masses near the summit. Clibrek, 3154 feet, is described in Gaelic as "round top of the birds", and except for its height and proximity to the road at Altnaharra ($3\frac{1}{2}$ miles away) is not remarkable. The route goes up grass and heather, and there is not much of a ridge. This landmark is composed of schistose rock, and is practically all covered with grass. The walk from the so-called Crask Inn, 750 feet above the sea, is without incident. In this area river and stream courses are open, their channels generally shallow; Clibrek's view included the flats of Caithness, the North Sea and the Orkneys.

Ben Hope contrasts in stern sublimity of its grand, dome-shaped mass with the battlemented precipices of Ben Loyal.

In riding days Clibrek was traversed on ponies, leaving the Lairg-Altnaharra road at the pass of Crask, following the long easy smooth ridge to the summit, and then dropping down to the cross-roads at Altnaharra inn.

CAMPS IN UTTERMOST SCOTLAND

To the hardy person I commend camping in uttermost Scotland; there are grand sites along Pentland Firth, and even one halfway to Cape Wrath, where a single tent could be pitched near the Cearbhag burn. John o' Groats is crowded, for every cycle camper in Britain makes pilgrimage there at least once. It is not a bad starting place, for there is a site near the shore, and at least two or more elevated crofts in the Duncansby direction. The views are striking: the Orkney Islands extend from South Ronaldshay, and Wideford Hill, near Kirkwall, is seen above Swona and Flotta, the outer guardians of Scapa Flow. Pentland Firth is at your feet, with the commerce of all Northern Europe passing through. Stroma, in mid-stream, has its legend of a wonderful mill which was driven by the tidal spray thrown up the cliffs and gathered in a pool. When you see a white tide roaring down the sound, you will not be surprised at the story at all. Spray flies far over the rocks, and makes strong rivulets.

Our next site also faced Orkney, from Brims Ness Farm, five miles west of Thurso. It must always be a noisy camp, for waves are for ever bursting on the long reefs a few yards away. From the west the site is guarded by a stone wall, but during our sojourn the breeze came from the north. Our three light tents ballooned and rattled a bit, and a motorist with much heavier gear packed up and made for shelter among the farm buildings. The evening was wild enough to fear trouble; there was a touch of Greenland ice in the heavy gusts, but never a peg moved, and I never went out into the night. Who would not risk a bit for a site where seals and porpoises come into the bay?

The next site we used, Tongue Mains, is at the end of the long shingle from which a ferry goes westward across the Kyle of Tongue. Unlike Brims, the soil is loose, and pegs have poorish hold, but the place is less exposed, and we chose a nook with a wonderful view of Ben Loyal and the

Loch Lomond at Ardlui

Photo by W. Thomson]

upper Kyle. Tongue Mains was found to be somewhat distant from water, farm or shop, but a longer visit would doubtless short-circuit these troubles. At Durness we camped near the Keoldale ferry, with water in the field, butter and eggs at the farm a hundred yards away. The field, however, seems to be used as a depot for sheep, and not always available.

These were camp-sites used on the Pentland coast. Many others could have been found, had we had written ahead giving notice of our arrival and needs. I found campers lurking in road metal quarries and on the open moors alongside the roads. I prefer to sleep on grass, to be able to leave tents without a guard, to be within reach of supplies. I claim a generation of experience, a thorough belief in ultra-lightweight equipment in calm and storm, and we know the art of "living on the land". Don't order food in a strange place; ask what they have got and so become acquainted with local specialities. While on the Firth, mushrooms, periwinkles and cockles were gathered for our pot.

The remotest Highlands give ideal camp-sites, but there are estates, half a score miles in extent, where the landlord has no love for our type and forbids tenants to give shelter. On the other hand many coastwise places are less remote and far more suitable.

If you are hiking or cycle-camping, you must live as the country folks live; if you have a motor-car, more gear and supplies can be transported. I would recommend a good supply of tinned meats from home of favourite sorts; the merchants of uttermost Scotland have stocks which are mostly strange brands.

In this camping trip alongside Pentland Firth we have had light plutters of rain every day, but the heaviest showers in a fortnight came while this chapter was being composed; I have just heard thunder, and now the air is clearing and we shall have a glorious eventide. The camper, if worth his or her salt, is independent of weather at all times and places.

The Pentland Firth coast is wild and rocky, or tame and sandy, all the way from Duncansby Head to Cape Wrath, for I have walked most of its miles. Beyond Cape Wrath the coast down to the Kirkaig river is truly and only Hebridean. It is cut into deep firths with big rocky peaks just standing off and hurling their torrents into the tides. This coast is the least-known part of Britain. Between it and the railway system lie leagues of moderate motor-roads, poor lanes and poorer paths. It is not easy to form even a wanderer's acquaintance with every sector. From Thurso round to Mallaig practically every yard of the country is devoted to deer or grouse, every stream is a preserve of salmon.

The wanderer is limited in activity—unless and until he becomes a law to himself—recognizes open spaces and "rights-of-way", and quietly insists on space for the tent he carries and wheedles where ordinary terms of purchase will not bring the necessary food.

Here, as elsewhere in the sportsman's Scotland, a trip early in the year gives least offence, and until the shooting and fishing tenants begin to appear the place is open to quiet enjoyment. At such time, too, it is less

difficult to obtain the written permissions, though for my part I don't want again to be present while a companion browbeats a furious ghillie into submission by showing the crest and letter of the man's erstwhile lord and master. It was not until we had reached the south-bound train that I was shown the full memorandum—tersely refusing us consent to put a foot on the great forest we had roamed for a week-end, using the ghillie's hut as headquarters and himself as an effective and active guide. It was far too late to indulge in qualms of conscience, but, well—never again!

HEBRIDEAN FISHERFOLK

The fisherfolk of the Hebridean coast are quaint and homely. Their memories for strangers are excellent; a gap of ten years and a growth of near four stones in weight gave them no doubt as to my identity. They resent patronage; they dislike amiable plans to interfere with their ancient independence; yet they are open to easy influence. How often have they ventured out into dirty weather because our trivial plans would be better suited by such action? Money is the least of all help in solving their problems. They would far rather revel in the old simplicity, just removed from want by a wee corner of the meal chest, than be rich and discontented. As story-tellers they are fine, and if you get the key of the village you are in for a good time.

My chief memories are for poaching stories; these yarns are not entirely my own. They were told one dark July night as we lay near the boat in a shallow bay. At sea was fog, the wind had fallen, the tide was setting. Instead of sweating all night at the heavy oars, we elected to get ashore and bivouac. And still, though years have passed and troubles come, how clearly I remember every detail. There was the chafing hiss of wavelets on the strand, a soft rumble as far out the tide-stream fumbled at the skerries. The night was too pleasant by far for sleep. Gnats and flies were at rest—or had not yet located us—but great white moths blundered and fluttered about, especially when Sandy struck a light for his pipe. We talked of other nights, and Sandy began an alluring account of night poaching. "I wouldn't dae it near hame," he declared; "one is ower weel kent at times." He told of the tempting price offered for a good "head", of the rifle he borrowed, then of the long barefoot tramp, the glens he crossed, the bealachs he passed, the detours to avoid farm and bothy and sheepfold.

In memory he crept through heather and bracken, and passed on to the bog of the high corrie. In anxious tones he recalled the creeping-in toward the stag's lair, and then the hour of waiting in the gloom. He could hear the breathing of the deer. At the first streak of dawn the rifle was produced. A fine head was somebody's desire. He got it—and Sandy got the venison and the hide, which so often have to be wasted by the trophy-getting poacher.

According to Sandy, there was nothing in "the trade". The stags are not

very vigilant at dawn, and there is more difficulty in sighting a borrowed weapon correctly in the young light than anywhere else in the expedition. He sees no romance in poacher-craft and has never been proud of it. He would rather repeat to me tales of the brave days of old when the homeless and proscribed fugitives of the Rebellion (or Ploy) of 1745 held the high forests, and killed their deer and grouse and salmon for subsistence. Or he would tell of later dare-devils who defied the deer preservers, took toll when and where they could in defiance of all law and authority. Sandy, however, listened readily to my story of mist and sleet, and of nights on the high mountains. He could not, however, understand the fascination the high places hold for some of us. "To go up of a fine night with a merry party is pleasure, no doubt; but all alone, with foul weather and no need, it is not reasonable sport at all."

Perhaps Sandy is too familiar with Nature's moods and whims to appreciate them. His nights of sea-fishing were no doubt full of incident and interest, but to him they were drab with work and hard faring. The casual seal or porpoise, dolphin or shark, scarcely marked the night from any others. He could tell of mysterious voices, of grim signs, of strange flashes and efflorescences. "Flowers of the sea," he admitted in an awed murmur. "Yes, I've seen them on calm nights in the Minch, great gardens of them, blazing in all colours, and almost touching the oar blades. One must keep the hand well inboard at such a time, for who knows what uncanny creature may be lurking down there at such a time and place."

The sea moan grew louder, more insistent; the tide hissed in more and more strongly. A sea-bird, like a lost ghost, floated along the water and, following the stream, passed out of sight. A salmon, meeting fresh water, leapt up in delight—he was a brave, hearty fellow and the splash of his fall rocked the water of the inner pool for quite a while. Now the tide ripped more swiftly into that little Hebridean cove, darker, darker swelled its waters, and the booming on the skerries rose from a distant murmur almost to speech—speech of rousing life, not a wailing of the dead. A sea-bird flew across, crying mournfully; but though darkness still held the land, there was a flutter of short wings, and a skylark spiralled away from its resting place on the island grass. Up, up in the cool darkness, then the little creature was limned against the turquoise vault, and we became aware that the dark hour of the morning watch has passed "as a tale that is told", and the swift primrose blue along the horizon was the herald of day.

PEAT CHARCOAL

On the west coast, blacksmiths did their work of old by aid of peat charcoal. Before 1840 coal was rarely imported, and all the old oak had been cut down, turned into charcoal, and used in the small furnaces or bloomeries at the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th centuries. Peat charcoal was good for its purpose. Osgood Mackenzie of Inverewe,



[Photo by Douglas Bolton]

Early morning at Portsonachan, Loch Awe, Argyll

Mist and Rain over Loch Tay

[Photo by Douglas Bolton]





Ross-shire, who was born in 1842, records: "I can just recollect the Gobha Mor (the big blacksmith) at Poolewe. He was the last smith who used it, and with him died the knowledge and skill required to make it."

"The best peat I have ever seen for burning purposes," he states elsewhere, "was only one foot in depth below the top sod, and had grown on blue clay, so that, as we cut the fuel, the lowest end of each peat had the clay attached to it, and turned into red bricks in the fire. These peats were nearly equal to coal, and were evidently like the Irishman's pig, very little and very old, which is more of a merit in peat than in pigs."

ORATORIES AMONG THE ROCKS

Part of Scotland has held fast to the Old Religion: in the Hebrides there was always a succession of priests to serve the oratories and little chapels among the rocks and isles. Some of these were practically cells or caves in the living rock; others were roughly built; many were unroofed yet with occasional services at their open-air altars. I am not of the Old Religion, but I have listened to its ritual when the roar of the tide has almost drowned the voices and when spray was drifted in clouds past the candles held near the priest. Such a service can be weird and impressive. There are other chapels too—hidden in the thick walls of towers, concealed between floors of great halls, even (in the proscribed days) in the attics and among the chimneys. But I prefer to think of oratories in the open air, in caves approached by winding steps and tracks, in cracks of the cliff where a few feet of rough masonry could not be detected. There is a haunted ledge in one cliff from which legend will have it, priest and congregations (as well as the last vestige of their chapel) were swept at one lick of a storm wave. In the deep woods are more lonely places of worship, but I must admit that they are not often found among the corries of the high bens.

The Scot apparently did not take well to the life of an anchorite or hermit. In other lands such men exiled themselves from their kind in order to keep roads, fords and bridges in the wilderness, to make possible the journeys of pilgrims and strangers. Such might not speak to their fellow men, but could work on their behalf. In a shattered castle wall there are vestiges of a little window which may have been an oratory or the secret refuge of some priest who offered forbidden rites and services. In the old times every castle had its chapel or two, and its resident chaplain who served both the chieftain and the humblest member of the household. Perhaps the people lived in more peril of their bodies than we do, and preferred to have a place of prayer and thanksgiving near at hand. A road journey was prefaced by an act of worship and intercession, and concluded by thanksgiving.

I have considered a long time about the "castles" which within the past century have been built in Scotland, but cannot call to mind that their plans even included a proper room for devotion and praise. The library could be turned into a place for devotion; so could the servants'

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Glen Ogle and Lochearnhead

Photo by Douglas Bolton]

hall; or some empty space, not attached for other purposes. But that is all. The family chaplain or priest has gone the way of many fine things of the past. We have greater houses, higher revenues, wider estates, but the personal staff within the house has shrunk to a mere score of casual paid servants, and the estate offers nothing in man-power to the resident in the "castle". Young brothers no longer go automatically into the Church and give services at home; the owner of the castle merely rushes in and out of its doors when sport with rod or gun is at its best, and that is all. The village church, we are told, is within a short motor-run and can be patronised by servants or guests at their pleasure. When the old Scottish families—Catholic and Protestant—turned away from close contact with their own home chapel or oratories, their doom was at hand, and their place knows them no more.

The very names of our western sea-lochs speak of wild remoteness—Inchard and Laxford, Cairnbawn, Inver, Broom, Grunard, Ewe, Gairloch, Torridon, Carron, Duich, Hourn and Nevis—each with its double or triple split fjord, its coterie of sloping glens, and its own coronet of rocks and heights. Then just inland the great fresh-water lochs which have found troughs, leagues in length, which almost count as extra arms of the Minch—Assynt, Skinaskink, na Shellag, Fionn, Marree, Damh, and far southern Morar. That the rivers are mere torrents is due to the nearness of the mountains to the western sea. In this land some fine bens are climbed from little fishing ports—Ben Strome from Strome Ferry, the Quinag from Unapool across the tiny kyle or narrows, Suilven from Lochinver, an Teallach from Dundonell, Liathach from Torridon, Sgriol from Arnisdale, and quite a series of the Knoidart hills from Barrisdale and Kinlochhourn.

PIPE MUSIC

This is a land of wonderful sea-scapes, wild rocky outlooks, remote from men, rarely seen, save by a few shepherds where sheep have gained foothold in the land of the wild red deer. Sometimes romance is met. Here is a note from an old diary, perhaps rather more carefully put together than many of my records:

"Across the lochan came the sound of pipes well played. From strath and glen the Highlanders were being called to some sheiling hidden from my view in the much crumpled hillside. In the soft calm of evening there was something fitting in this wild music, the home-calling of moor, loch and rill. So awhile I let the boat drift and listened in silence. Surely, surely, all the voices of the bonnie land are expressed in the music of its native pipes. Of the land, but not of the people for that would include the crude, the artificial dissonance of the city, the mine, the foundry, the engine-shop and the factory. The pipes are of the land primeval, recking little of the works and sounds of man.

"Hark to that! It is the sound of the gathering, the invitation soft and yet stern to the clan to meet their patriarch, their chief. There is a note of

menace in it, a croaking of the corbies maybe, but more than that the ringing plaintive song of the lark. There is no surprise note; everything is as calm, stately and purposeful as a morning of May when the birds are springing, singing, from the grass-tufts right up to the threshold of Heaven itself.

“And after the sound of the gathering, comes the marching of men, like the steady rattle of the burn while gentle rain is still soaking the moor and the mountain. There is a solid, an increasing throb, as the burn becomes a river wrestling with the rocks in its steep channel, and the music ceases on a note of calm as though the downpouring waters were presenting themselves in a still, deep loch in the upper glen. But behind this note of calm, there is expectancy—to rally to the summons is no more the end of progress than the high level loch is the destiny of the spouting rills. Again the pipes throb to the marching of men—but more steadily. The clan is locked shoulder to shoulder in their expedition of war. It is as though the long-dead wolves of the forest were keeping tryst again for a raid in mass on some glen fat with kine and sheep. The march quickens to a lope, then becomes a fierce on-press. Then is heard the yelling of eagles, the call of the mighty ones to battle, to grips and blows with the foe. It is the cataclysm of primitive force; one hears the roaring of thunder, the slashing of rain, the screaming of the winter gale through the rock towers of a rugged, barren land. There is strength unbound, swiftness unfettered; the joy of battle, the rage of destruction; there is pride of contest, the weight of mighty and skilful blows. Through, through the music chants the eternal war-song of Nature, the procession of elements perpetually at strife. The eagle alone delights in the tumult; even the sea-petrel, even the giant skua is mute in the blast, and the sin, the shamelessness of war flaunts itself over the whole.

“Shock succeeds shock; the wild skirl resounds, echoes, commands, leads. It is the voice of the war eagles, and all other Nature is dumb. Again shock upon shock, and then quietly, insistently, comes the note of triumph. The enemy is shaken, he quivers, he rallies, he is over borne, dismayed, defeated. And into this struggle comes victory, victory dearly-won. The warrior eagles are exultant, triumphant.

“Again the note of the war pipe changes, for on the field of blood the muster-roll is called, and there is a long chapter of ‘missing’. In the bog and in the heather, in the thin woodlands, and among the boulders on the bleak hillsides are lying huddled masses, which once were men. Some of the fallen are great and mighty, so up into the dusk goes the thin wail of the coronach, the curlew-song drear and sorrowful over the reedy marshes. But more sad than the curlew’s call is the moaning of the wood-doves, for every one of the fallen was a child of the clan, and more intense than the wild mourning for the great is the intimate, quiet moaning of the families bereft of their strong ones. The croak of the raven, the harsh voice of the hoodie-crow, fall away to silence. The clan, elate with well-earned victory of arms, is returning with a tell of woe as well. And

now through the gloom, the sadness, comes again the song of the lark, a steady uprising uplift to the soul. Nought can recall the strong men who have fallen, but hope there is of the eternal army, of warriors young and eager leaping into the yawning ranks and to bring new honours, win achievements to vie with those of the old and departed. The spirit of the pipe is deathless as the hills, constant as the tiny rills, unchangeable as the songs of the larks, the blackbirds, and the thrushes. And the music sighs itself to sleep, to sleep which is not death, to sleep which is but preparation for the struggle, the triumph of tomorrow.

"But when again the calls of the pipe-player rang over the darkening loch, and clambered up to the heavens where golden shafts of sunset were still playing, it was on an older, better theme, the theme of love. It burst forth a torrent from its prison in the rocks, powerful but not certain in direction, tussling, ebbing, flowing, then spouting and flinging its jewels high in rare abandon. Its rush overbears the trees, undermines the rocks, defies the mountains yet its excess nourishes green cushions of moss, tiny nooks of primroses, the roots of sturdy ferns. The piper not content with a personal theme must call the world to witness the new miracle, must weigh the whole world in the tiny balances of its new, new passion, must view the Eternal Himself by its eyes. What theme more ambitious than this! Nature in its wildness admits the present power and attunes the future to this mystic, magic lay of love. A whole choir of bird-voices, like a mighty organ, rings through the music until the ears are almost stunned force. The theme would be all-powerful, would weld together the birds of field and loch and moor and mountain, warblers, finches, linnets, thrushes, with the hosts of winter visitors, the wild, free grouse of the moors, the black game of the woods, the fierce peregrine of the rooks, the buzzard of the wide-spread wing, the raven, and even the war eagle in one tangle of silken bonds. Then going further it would enmesh the fowls of the sea, waders, divers, swimmers, gulls large and small, gannet, skua and even the cormorant. Gaining more scope in its own imaginations the theme tries to bind all the animals together, the mighty stags and hinds, the furtive foxes, the timid hares and wary rabbits, the badger, the red squirrel, and creatures many of the smaller kind.

"Then back on its true source swings the music, and there, rising in dominance at every turn, is the voice of man, of woman. And the pipes lilt of love in the sheilings, of summer joys among the hills, of the cot in the glen when the days on the heights are over. Up, up, rises their song in majesty and power, the birds, the beasts, the flowers, the monarch, mankind, of this world below, and uplifted on the powerful theme higher, ever higher, nearer, ever nearer, it approached to the feet of the Eternal Father. Nearer and still more near until, through the vision of the pipes of love, is seen the face of the Most High. And when the sound in the ears ceases, there is still a harmony of the soul, but the piper casts down his instrument and waits in quietude for a speech which is not given in words.

"And listening thus one feels that there is a great message in the music of the pipes, a message which makes one forget that the sun of today has set long behind the mountains, and that the boat beneath is but a leaky, crazy craft, and not at all a golden barge to carry the soul, full-charged with Nature's blessings, swiftly, softly, silently to the Isles of the Blest."

MACKAY PIPERS

It is singular that the four long-lived Mackay pipers were attached to the lairds of Gairloch during almost exactly two centuries during which there had been eight lairds in regular succession from father to son, but only the four pipers. Rory, the first, was a Mackay born in Reay, Sutherland, in 1592, and dying about 1689. He served four lairds, married at sixty, produced an only son in 1656. John, the son, was blinded by small-pox at the age of seven, and was trained as piper by the Macrimmons of Skye. He too married very late, and had a son, Angus (who succeeded him) and a daughter. John died in 1754 aged 98. Angus, born 1725, also lived to an extreme old age. John, grandson of the blind piper, was family piper to the laird of Gairloch. John migrated to America. Sir Hector said that he would never care to hear pipe music again, and Gairloch never kept another piper.

Caves in Skye used to be pointed out where the scholars of Macrimmon used to practice on the chanter, the small pipe, and large bagpipe, without disturbing the workers on farm and by the coast. Dr. Samuel Johnson in 1779 was exhilarated by the bagpipe at Armadale and Dunvegan.

As to the sword dance, the legend is that a chieftain of the isles originated it when he slew the first tax-gatherer who came to him, and then, crossing his sword with that of the rash intruder, danced his triumph over them. Another ancient amusement was called Swinging the Plaid or handkerchief. Each singer clutched a corner, and stamped out the time with his (or her) feet.

GAELIC FIDDLERS

Merry making in the glens and by the shores has sadly changed. There are whole clans who have difficulty in raising one efficient piper, and in many a parish not a fiddler remains to preserve the ancient tunes. Imagine a clan gathering where all the music for flying feet must be given by an alien. Great musicians, like the M'Crimmons of Skye, like Neil Gow, were superior to clan boundaries but the old folk aye preferred a minstrel of their own to carry on the traditional songs and tunes. There was Willie Blair, of Deeside, a player of his own excellent compositions such as "The Brig o' Crathie" and "Miss Anderson's Strathspey". Few could sit still when his elbow was at work. Willie once travelled to Dublin, and played in a hall there. Now, there is much difference in temperament between the Erse and the Gael, so Deeside was aroused to interest. "How

did they like your music, Willie?" "Raal weel; they jist pattered me back ilka time."

Over the Grampians there was a powerful rival, Neil Gow of the Tay. Willie admitted that the Perthshire man deserved a qualified measure of approval for his general music. "Aye, he can *play*; but he hesna just the stott o't." By which he meant the special marking of the time, which is a most essential feature of reel-playing. Willie and his minister were rare friends, though the latter was severe against the fiddler's indulgence in strong drink. When Willie had been to a whisky bout, he would give the minister a "cry" as he passed: "I've been ower at a dance at the Inver, sir, and I just cam on my wye hame so that ye micht see me, in case ye did hear I was waur nor I am." Willie, who was popularly called the Queen's fiddler, because he was often called upon at royal dances, lived to be over 90, and fiddled—and whiskied—almost to the last. Even the great Neil Gow wasn't proof against Highland hospitality. He tersely expressed that when in a certain condition "it wasna the length o' the road, but the breadth o't", that bothered him.

Most of our Northern fiddlers may rank as self-taught; some families have a strong inclination for music, and from childhood absorb the rudiments. Indeed an observer is occasionally surprised in a gathering of granite-hard farmers or fisherfolk, to pick out a face and hands refined by the worship and practice of music. On the other hand the best dancers never show any visible softening power, though, of course, their bearing, limbs and muscles are glorious, moulded and tensioned by constant effort.

When in a Highland festival the musicians tire or adjourn for food, there is always the substitute of "chanting" the reels for the dancers. By mouth music the measure and cadence are produced for the short period necessary for refreshment.

The harp was the most noted Highland instrument of music, and in the courts of kings the harper bore a distinguished rank. Every Chief had his own trained harper as well. One of the last native harpers was Roderick Morrison, who was blind. He was harper to the Laird of M'Leod, and died in Mull in 1734. For a long time the harp had been giving way to bagpipe for outdoor music, and the violin for indoor affairs. The great pipe is peculiar to the Highlands, a much improved instrument on the old model still seen in Belgium and Italy.

EVENINGS IN LOCHABER

Except to the Nature lover and wanderer, Morar, Moidart, Sunart, Ardgour, Morven, and Ardnamurchan is practically unknown ground. The sportsfolk, with their rifles and deerkeepers, with rods and water ghillies, with guns to slay grouse and all their wealth have only the haziest ideas beyond their own shooting and angling lodges in high summer and autumn. The season of residence is limited by their pursuits. The winter flood which sweeps round the bridges, which fills the fords deep with broken, racing water, which may for a whole day baffle the wanderer

from reaching the well-known hostelry or quarters, is quite unknown to them.

Even Lochaber has many mysteries. This part of Western Scotland—in which Nevis is king of all mountain groups, loftiest, broadest, snowiest—has a reputation for weather both “coarse” and “soft a wee”, which is undoubtedly deserved when winter or summer breaks down. Yet there are periods of glorious weather, even in high January, after the gales of the year-ending have blown themselves out. But even so the streams, the loch, and the deep-sea firths are cold places, to be looked upon and just a little visited. The sunny side of the glen road is a far happier place. My first Easter walk was out of Fort William for half-a-dozen miles along General Wade’s military road towards Kinlochleven, then to the right to Loch Lundavra and by “right-of-way” and cattle-track down to Salachiel. Still further down the fold in the hills to where the cart-road bridged the burn, then across the shelf of moorland, with glorious views down Loch Linnhe and across the narrow strait to the hills of Ardgour, packed still with winter snow. The route ended for me on the coast-road between Corran and Fort William, but it was amusing, and guided rather by bearings than any definite line of passage. Those miles of moorland, with their dark bronze of heather, the soft green of rising grass, the sepia touches and dashes and tufts of trees, the blue sealoch, and the white-lined shores and skerries remain a striking memory.

It’s forty odd years since I first entered Lochaber by the military and clan track which strikes from Rannoch Moor to Fort William. The winter dusk fell ere I cleared Kinlochleven, but the evening was young, I was fresh, and I had arranged for an arrival at Fort William later than the evening train. According to the map, the track—though open—appeared to be definite, and I rejected the tentative suggestion that I should take the long sea-level trounce along the north shore of Loch Leven and lane (as it was then) by Onich and Corran. I pushed up the long greyish slopes for an hour before I discovered that I was in for a pretty wild introduction to Lochaber. Cold mist dropped on the desolate pass, and the roar of the burns became shrill. There was a booming, too, in the back regions of the Mamore Forest which did not please me. The darkness deepened,

mingling thick,

A formless grey confusion covered all.

Thomson.

Again and again I had difficulty in identifying the “road” among the broken and tangential sheep paths. According to the calendar, a full moon should have kept tryst, but the night was mirk, without any relief.

Luckily, in those days, I was an excellent traveller by night, and my eyes were fit to pick up the landmarks which more than actual track defined the route. The mild afternoon gave way to a gripping cold, and my jacket was frozen stiff as a board. Two hours of gloom, of eager and intent track-watching passed; the sheep path gave way to a faintly-rutted cart-road, and I was encouraged. Then the weather turned an unexpected trick: a sharpening blast blew into my face, and there was a painful peppering with snow crystals—not hail, not the thin choking atoms of a blizzard, but severe punishment indeed. Luckily the snow-fall did not increase, though the wind rose to a yelling gale. As the only shelter would have to be sought in fields of boulders, with little chance of again finding the track, I pressed resolutely forward, regretting that I could not bring my mind to bear on this moorland of warriors—the boundary between the clans Donald and Campbell. After the battle of Inverlochy in 1645, the decimated army of Argyle fled this way, and there are monuments alongside the track. I would see them another time; this track might be traversed in summer daylight, so what matter? Accordingly I concentrated on the track; it was now more definite, but a shatter of snow was falling, and there was every chance that a false track or turning might be taken, and that I should stray out on the moor and so lose hours of hard work.

Welcome indeed was the shelter of a deep river gorge, in the depths of which a real bridge spanned a brawling stream. I was content and could say with Tennyson:

But God is with me in this wilderness,
Those wet black passes and foam-churning chasms—
And God's free air, and hope of better things.

I was aware that some six miles of country remained to be crossed, but I had won over the pass and the moor, and was in safety though the track was still steep. The Lochaber storm was finished, and on the long descent to Loch Linnhe the snow and wind rapidly diminished. When at last I dropped from the folds of the mist, I found a calm, cold and dark evening. The sky never cleared, and I was glad to reach the shelter of my hotel.

When away from home, especially in winter, I was always taunted with uneasiness: storm and calm, rain or shine, snow or frost, I could not remain indoors for more than an hour at a time, unless engaged in some work. Mere discussion soon palls. This habit has brought me some grand rewards in night scenes, of which some about Loch Linnhe are here recalled.

My second night was just opposite to the first in its weather. I had been on the bens during the day—there are other peaks than Ben Nevis in this neighbourhood—and, instead of dining late, I took a meal soon after sunset so that I could walk in the moonlight. Most of the guests thought this queer, but the Highland landlady rather approved

my choice. Grandmother though she was, she thought the lochside at night could be romantic, full of beauty and of peace. She emphasized the peace. And the peace of that Lochaber night will abide with me for ever. Upper Linnhe is a sea-water loch, but, beyond the narrows at Corran, it is little troubled by ride-tips; and only the blue-green of the water tells its friendliness with the ocean. That night the calm pool reflected brown foothills, steep sepia crags, reflections of birch and larch, the white caps of the bens. It reflected too the purple vault of the sky, and the bright points of ten thousand stars. Outside the little town, nobody was astir, but in distant crofts there were friendly lighted windows, and the silence was broken by collies which barked at each other across the fields and glens. It was an impressive night in which all Nature seemed to conspire to make me think:

The peak is high, and the stars are high,
And the thought of a man is higher.

Tennyson.

I was disappointed when the moon rose, paled the vault and thrust back the fires of the stars by many degrees. They had just become friendly signals, beacons for me, and now its silvery stream pushed us apart.

To the Highland grandmother I mentioned this feeling, and she too appreciated. Moonlight is not always an advantage; it cuts away some beauties though it gives more of its own.

A week later I returned alongside the loch in stormy darkness. All day the snow-crested rocks of Ardgour had given us rough welcome; in the rising storm we were just able to cross Corran ferry. "Had I not promised I should not have come," said the Gaelic boatman in his slow, difficult English. I certainly did not expect to find him waiting at the stone pier, for the west was lowering and the cross-seas nasty. I was too excited to be sick or even cold, although waves leapt and grinned at us, and the spray flew in buckets into the boat. One man had to bale all the time. Then we elected to march on to Fort William rather than engage a horse-drawn conveyance and endure a cold journey.

What a contrast compared with my moonlit night! Where I had experienced an almost perfect peace, there was now elemental war—not a straight-striking storm like that on Wade's road, but a personal enemy, a storm which lurked and twisted, hit from all directions in turn. A storm which scooped the waves from the loch and spilt them over our heads; a storm which took us aback when it recoiled from the rocks and twisted down the glen. It was quite exciting. The noise was prodigious, even menacing; the waves roared and crashed on the boulders of the shores; the wind screamed among the dark hills, boomed in the wooded hollows and whistled eerily over the rocks. It is not pleasant to stand beneath a roadside crag, and to hear the storm making a thin scream across the corner not a yard away. Here and there we halted for a moment, but the

storm soon changed direction and hunted us out. I do not know whether there was flood on the road; it was so covered with water that one more continuous pool than the next was not noticed. Every rock seen in the half-light was streaming; there were cataracts within hand-reach of the road.

That we were on a sound road was thankful; there was no trouble about direction; we knew the welcome that was awaiting us, the wildest squall merely could postpone. I thought of the people who described the mountain opposite us as the Lochaber weather-glass; it was hurling all its weather at us tonight.

It was the Highland grandmother who admitted us, exclaimed at our wetness, at our fatigue with buffeting storm, and declared that we should have waited at Corran for the night storm would soon be over. As every door was straining and every window was rattling, we smiled at the idea. But within two hours there was a definite slackening, then a sudden hush in the wind, and a flash as the moon broke through the tattered clouds, and its light touched the tumbling waves of the sea-loch with silver. "It will be a good day for the ben tomorrow," exclaimed the mother prophet, so we planned an extra early start. Though our expedition lasted about twenty hours, the "day" was superb in regard to weather, and the night was glorious indeed.

ACROSS BEN MORE OF MULL

Mull is in sight from most of the Lochaber hills, and my eyes turned in that direction so often that I made plans to visit it. In Scotland there is a worthy cult of mountain-lovers who evince the ambition of conquering every "top" over 3000 feet in height North of the Border. Ben More of Mull rises 3169 feet, so must be tackled. The other peaks are well below the magic level, and like typical granite mountains are scattered and not clustered in groups. I managed a car lift to Kinloch on the south side of the mountain, and left the road at 8 a.m. In order to travel light I had left the map behind in my other kit, and soon got into difficulties. A decent-looking farmhouse was in front, yet I drew blank of information: the place was empty. However a stream splashing down from a corrie was the obvious route, and up I scrambled. The corrie seemed to have access to the highest peak in sight. At about 1000 feet up I "moved" a large party of deer; they had been feeding together, trampling among the moss and marsh. The herd crossed the burn in single file, and I left off counting at 70, with quite a few still to come. In the shade of the cliffs that sphagnum was still stiff with frost, and among the broken strata of the ben were a few patches of late snow.

For a long while I steadily moved up the steep grass, rising to the loose beds of scree. I had a fear that the pass I was aiming for would drop steeply on the northern side for I could see no sign of the deer breaking along the skyline as they would do for an ordinary ridge crossing. I would have sacrificed a 1½d. stamp for the possession of that special map

at the moment. Yes, the screes did drop steeply, but there was no cliff or undercut strata. I was off the line to the top of the ben, but the ridge to the west was clear going. It was steep and loose enough to need some care. For the last corner I used, but did not need, my hands. The view was glorious: the south was a wonderful medley of peaks, islands and slabs of sea appearing without any regard to plan. Iona across its narrow strait, the wonderful lumps of the Ross of Mull seen from the least inspiring side make up the view, with a deep glen winding towards Craignure. Loch na Keal, down below, was practically invisible, but Northern Mull was a contour map on which lights and shadows chased. Staffa and the Treshnish Isles to the West, Skye's jagged crags to the north and Rum to the west of it. The Paps of Jura are to the south, and the peaks of Cruachan and Ben Lui to the east on the mainland. Haze hung in the west, but the Outer Hebrides should be visible there.

As I scrambled along the comb of rocks, I saw that Ben More's northern cliff had several patches of snow, and I wandered off to pick a snowball. I was lucky, finding a sheet close quite, among the broken rocks. The descent was easy, but every now and then a jolt warned me that when travelling alone on a lonely peak in the off-season, a bit of care is necessary. No one in Mull knew the way I had gone, and a casual wanderer might be missing for a long time. So I slackened pace to a crawl at every slippery outcrop and leisurely made my way down to Loch na Keal, reaching the shore-road at the sixth milestone from Salen. My exit was hastened by passing thunder-rain in drops which splashed like small wet balls. I put on speed, and found, to my delight, that my pace, even after a climb up to 3169 feet, and with much scree and bog wandering, was not bad. Indeed each mile was an improvement on its predecessor. I began with a mile in 20 minutes, and finished, going steadily, in a burst of $14\frac{1}{2}$ minutes between the last two posts. I wonder whether they were really a mile apart.

What did I eat on the trip: I brought from the mainland a heel of wholemeal bread, and this, with two wedges of cheese, was more than sufficient. It was my first visit to Mull, and throughout the day I was either fully occupied among the broken stones, or thoroughly interested in the beautiful outlook. The views over the inner islands were fine, and Loch na Keal—well, I shall have to go a considerable distance to find a more delightful and diversified sea-loch.

TENTING IN HISTORIC IONA

To me islands have a great fascination: it matters little whether they are in reaches of rapid rivers, in sea-lochs where the tides hiss, in fresh water lochs or lakes, or in the open ocean. I love to feel remote, to pitch my tent alone or in an isolated community. This year I travelled alone, hiking with tent and gear to Iona, a famous island of the Inner Hebrides, where the population of 234 lives quietly after the hectic months of July, August and September, when steamers daily bring their hundreds of

tourists to look at the old Cathedral, which was established by St. Columba, a missionary from Ireland, several years before Augustine landed in Kent and preached the Gospel to the pagan Saxons.

In Mid-May Iona can only be reached by roundabout routes. You can join the slow ship at Glasgow every ten days and make a slow trip calling at many tiny ports. Or the Tobermory steamer can be taken from Oban, a landing made at Salen, and a trip by mail-car over 38 miles brings you to Fionphort, with a mile of ferry between you and Iona. As a carrier of fine weather, I was welcome to Iona. The three days prior had been particularly cold, wet and windy. "As bad as any time last winter," said the captain of the MacBrayne steamer which traffics to Mull and the Inner Hebrides.

Iona had never seen a lightweight outfit before; the summer dwellers in tents had brought timber frames, heavy sheets of canvas, and "I fear you will be blown away in the night". The whole community took interest in my venture, and opined that I had come so far—as other early-season men and women do—to study the birds and probably to give fair profits to the motor-boat owners. The sea-swallows or terns had just returned from their winter quarters on the shores of Spain, and were bubbling their cry as they dived into the strait near a red buoy and opposite my tent. The black-headed gulls were nesting, a few here and there; but the common gull had not yet taken possession of the uninhabited islands, which are white with birds at nesting time. I revelled, however, also in the flowers: they are dwarf of stem for there is much wind, and the violets are adepts at turning their purple lobes over when the wind blows hard. Some primroses were unusually wide and bright, and the early purple orchis and the wild hyacinth (blue-bell) appeared side by side.

My camp kit, which includes everything needed for hotel and kitchen weighs about 16 lbs., and is usually used by two persons. With it I am prepared to cut away from all but a farm supplying milk and eggs for several days at a time. I daresay that by adding a tin or two of condensed milk to the stock I could do without the farm; but I like companionship, and I can never understand a district without some help from the natives. Besides, I am not out to be primitive, like the hermit fellow who goes every summer to Lunga and spends a month among the sea-birds, cooking their eggs in a biscuit tin lid over a fire of driftwood.

I can easily carry the kit for a dozen miles of hard going, but on this trip there was no need for shoulder-work, and I carried the luxury of a typewriter, weighing 10 lbs. more, to make these notes on the spot. The camp kit contains tent, fly-sheet (an extra worth the weight, particularly as I had a night of frost in Iona), oiled ground sheet, woollen ground blanket, large eiderdown quilt (a small one would serve), teapot-kettle, frying-pan, two other pans, and all the necessary cutlery; small primus stove, sugar, tabloid tea, butter in a protected glass dish, night gear and so on.

For my food I depend largely on local purchases, chiefly at farms.

Here in Iona white bread is not obtainable. The slow ship, which comes every tenth day from Glasgow, brings it, and as a week had elapsed since her last visit, stocks at the shop had run out. However, I managed quite well, getting griddle scones from a farm, with eggs and milk. I had brought bacon from Oban and a little such meat goes quite a long way.

I picked a sheltered site for my tent, behind an outcrop of granite rock, and with a wonderful view to the eastward right to Ben More, 3169 feet, with a few patches of snow visible on its dark screes. The strait in front of me was radiant in sunshine, and in shadow had an intensity which outrivals the Mediterranean. The tent door faced the sunrise, and each morning the light aroused me to a wonderful outlook over sea, rocks and mountain. At night there were magnificent scenes, but I never saw real starlight. The May nights were too bright.

But where is Iona and why, you ask? St. Columba, with twelve companions, landed here in 563. He had determined to leave his native Ireland, and this was the first coast from which Ireland was far beyond the horizon. St. Columba founded a monastery, of which no remains exist, and made missionary journeys in which he converted to Christianity the Northern Picts and other inhabitants of the Hebrides. Orkney, Shetland, even Iceland were visited. The Saint died in 597, shortly after Augustine landed in Kent to convert the Saxons. Columba was buried in Iona, but after a century his remains were transferred to Ireland, and all trace of them was lost. He built at Iona a cathedral unique on the west coast of Scotland, which became the burial place of Kings. In St. Oran's cemetery are the graves of forty-eight Scottish, eight Norwegian, and four Irish monarchs. Duncan, murdered by Macbeth, was the last of the Scottish line, and he was buried in 1040. After this Dunfermline was the cemetery of the Scots.

After Columba's time, his island was pillaged and ruined again and again by Pagan Danes and Norse Vikings. In 1072 Queen Margaret of Scotland rebuilt the monastery, and later the Benedictine monks and nuns had charge of the island. St. Oran's chapel, built by the Queen in 1080, is the oldest building in the island. The cathedral, founded in the 13th century, has been roofed, and within the present century turned into religious service. It is no larger than many an English village church, and is full of the usual relics. In pre-Reformation times 360 crosses were on the island, but of these only two are now erect—and finely designed and boldly carved crosses they are.

Iona is a low island, treeless, stony, yet not barren. Much of the grass land is worked by antiquated methods. There is neither telephone, electric light nor motor-car on the island—perhaps the last lack may please many readers, but it must also be pointed out that from July the island is crowded with visitors, and there is much difficulty in getting lodgings or shelter. In the late season I certainly would take my tent again and camp on the western (not the eastern) shore, probably close to the golf links (where there are far more daisies than grass plants), and look across a fine

bathing beach to the Atlantic. Perhaps the western light of Skerryvore would whirl its beam through the curtains of my tent; the lighthouse is on a reef some twenty-five miles to the west.

FURTHER SOUTH TO KINTYRE

South of Oban the land is less rugged, and the belt of real wilderness narrowed down by veritable straths of farm lands, yet from the sea to Loch Awe there are numerous short foot-passes well worthy of exploration. Melfort and Craignish are on a much-used motor-road, but even then the passes are pleasing, particularly in the early spring, say May. From Oban to Crinan is, in my opinion, an ideal camping shore, just as the glens of Inverness and Ross are for the rough bivouac or sleeping-bag. The various clachans and farms can supply all that is needed of provisions, and sites and sheltering woods are plentiful. Perhaps this is a lazy shore compared with the strands beneath the mighty bens, but it can be made strenuous enough by those blessed with superfluous energy.

As my present knowledge of Kintyre's long thumb of moor and hill and shore is restricted to a single visit, and relished by many a distant view of it from Northern Ireland, across the firths and down the glens, it is scarcely possible to pretend authority. But a friend of mine years ago reported a crazy holiday here, during which he accepted the guidance of grass blades. At every fork of path he picked up a few blades, and took the direction shown by the upper of the first crossed blades. Certainly his zigzags and his bivouacs, and especially his harking back to old haunts, were weird and wonderful. I should not care for such haphazard methods—though I admit to a cycle tour in which we kept the wind ever at our backs. My friend's joy in Kintyre was certainly huge, but I cannot remember that he ever repeated the experiment. As he married during the following year—not in Kintyre—possibly there was a reason against such quaint wandering.

Of the lochs and glens opening on the Firth of Clyde there is little need to write. Steamer-routes and motor-roads carry thousands of holiday-makers through the area every summer. It may be that Rothesay is overcrowded, that the Arran coast is a miniature Glasgow, that Dunoon and Inveraray are occupied by brigades of visitors. Glenelg and Hell's Glen, and the road across Cowal by Loch Eck, may be somewhat noisy, but after all the lover of wilder Scotland does not dispute the right of the world and his wife, sons and daughters, to enjoy the more accessible portions of the national beauty. Here, as elsewhere, a couple of hours' tramp, a short cycle run, takes one out of the zone of hilarious activity even during the holiday months. A quiet farm, a lonely clachan, is sure to be available if patiently searched for, while a little knowledge of ferries and steamer piers adds a better chance of peace. About Ardlui there are great bens, and the charms of Lomond, loch and ben, have been sung by the great and gifted.

Arran must not be overlooked, though in each decade its haunts of

ancient peace disintegrate and disappear. When I was younger, the bays of the western shore were practically unknown, and the glens of that side of Goat Fell were rarely visited. Today the west is almost as popular as East Arran was thirty years ago, and the Brodick area is practically a suburb of the Clyde cities. Still some places remain on the island with liberty and seclusion enough to interest the wanderer.

CHAPTER II

MEMORIES OF THE LOCHS

Upper and Lower Lomonds—Awe—Untameable Tay—Lubnaig—Spean Lochs—Spey-an-Eilean, Morlich and Avon—Muick's Claims—Northernmost Lochs—Assynt—Maree—Arkaig—Ness.

MY first Scottish loch was Doon, in Galloway, as seen from the railway train. Though years have passed and visits repeated by cycle and car, I have strong memories of grim clusters of Scots pines, of blue distant mountains, of plummy watergrass, of ploughlands, of dark grouse moors and of sheep pastures stretching to the far horizon. There was no sense of disappointment, though the loch was seen after full knowledge of the Cumbrian lakes and tarns. The rich green and gold, the bracken, fern, moss and crag of Cumberland were gloriously unlike the dark pine and heather of Doon. I have fished in Doon several times during camps on farms with sporting rights in its waters.

What glorious lochs I have visited since that day—Lomond, Awe, Ericht, Tay, Earn, Tummel, Rannoch, Ness, and Garry, which are all big fellows, with such small tarns as Lubnaig, Vennachar, Katrine, Brandy and many more. When you get north of the Caledonian Canal there are districts where the map seems to have more lake than land. And what a variety! No two lochs are nearly alike, in many cases no two miles of any loch are alike. With all reverence, let it be put down that after making each Scottish loch, the Great Creator broke the mould. He wished to build no other of that type, and was unwilling that man should venture his prentice hand in that direction. There is much about the natural loch which the most cunning of reservoir engineers fails to incorporate in his plans. And as the high-level lochs are more and more used in hyrdo-electricity schemes the blunders are more obvious and poignant and accumulate with every scheme. Rape of high level loch (miscalled development) continues and increases. I do not know which loch in my list will be the next victim, but write of them in their natural form.

UPPER AND LOWER LOMONDS

There is a southern Loch Lomond, a mighty plain of water studded with wooded islets. It is low of shore, a place of soft beauty, of ease and delight. On the horizon there is just a smudge of towers and battlements to tell of distant mountains. As approach is made, the cone of Ben Lomond becomes a striking feature. Just a few stages on, there is another Loch Lomond, the upper reach which narrows into Glen Falloch. This is a lonelier and grander stretch with bens rising closer, wilder and rockier.





Some are over 3000 feet in height. In most months of the year there are signs of snow in some corries. The Cobbler has an extraordinary outline, and finishes in a rock tower the face of which troubles novice climbers, but experienced wanderers come round the back of the ridge to the top. Red deer and roe may be seen without leaving the waterside. Ben Arthur, Ben Ime, Ben Vorlich and Ben Lomond rise from the loch with Ben Lui and many another peering down from distant glens. No longer is there the broad, smiling cornland, the rich pasture. The fields are cramped and poor of colour, and hardy sheep and black cattle find sustenance among the hummocks, the coves and the hills of broken rock.

In winter there is a new, a sterner and fairer Loch Lomond. Leagues of ringing ice and dark patches of wooded islets and away, beyond, the awful majesty of white mountains. In a great ice year (such as that in which I made its acquaintance), days might have been spent skating on the loch, visiting and passing hamlets and islands which before had been no more than names. At such a season, it is well to take opportunity to walk up the great slope of Ben Lomond to a sufficient height to look up and down the loch, and away over the silent moors and frozen farmlands to the dark moving waters of Clyde and tide.

AWE

Awe gains in grandeur as its head is approached. In its geological past, the great basin under Ben Cruachan drained south-west to the Atlantic. There have been upheavals and changes, and the outflowing water has set in a different direction. It has worn a deep channel through a belt of crushed rock at the north-west corner of the loch, and now bickers and roars down to Loch Etive. My memories include a cold vigil as the row-boat slowly worked its way up to Kilchurn Castle, and then coasted along the north shore to the pass of Brander where road and rail creep between Curachan and Awe. How finely the great mountain mass loomed against the purple-blue vault. The stars seemed to be dim and distant that night, but much perhaps was due to the full moon, the silver-pathed waters, and the gleaming ivory of snow.

Loch Awe on a spring day can provide a strenuous hour. The open waters are furrowed and darkened by boisterous rain-squalls, and all the while there is a cold, raw gale. The tiny boat is tossed like a cork. The waves run high, and when a cross-breeze gets to work, there may be more than enough work for the baler. Indeed, there is an imminent fear of capsizing or foundering. The return to fishing quarters is often a tedious and laborious task. The boat is skulked up the sheltered bays, then sweeps into the eye of the storm where progress may be defeated, and in any case is only won by inches at a time.

UNTAMEABLE TAY

Loch Tay is a great untameable span of water though its banks are less sterile than Loch Awe and farms and hamlets are well spread about

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Strath Spey from Speybridge

Photo by Douglas Bolton

its bays. I have known wild days there in plenty, yet to me Tay, after a night of summer rain, remains the most radiant of Scottish waters. Even at mid-lake there is the hoarse echo of many torrents. Every glen has its tongue, and away in the high corries cascades leap white and full down rocks and steep slopes. In all this tumult Lochay glen has but a sweet, soft warble as though the music was just beginning again after the brief dash down the waterfall a few miles up the glen. Dochart at the head of the lake and its main feeder is more emphatic. Down it the torrents rush with merry and uproarious shouts; even in high summer it remains vocal.

The casual sort of wanderer believes Loch Earn to be just a small-scale copy of its greater neighbour, Tay. If you spend the best part of a warm summer night on its waters you will be as convinced as I am that no other loch is nearly like that of Earn. It has such deep shadows, soft-toned bays, clear shields of open water, and great palls of bronze gloom which at the witching hour fill the corries above and leave the distant ridges and buttresses sharp and clear in the starlight. There is less of silence here—the songs of the thrush-kind are heard till far into the evening, and in a few half-hours myriad larks are proclaiming a day which is yet to be. In the interval birds of the night are busy, particularly those sweet night-warblers which live in the water grass and recall to us the nightingales of southern lands.

LUBNAIG

I have to select at random from many memories of Lubnaig, a loch beside a great drove road and clan pass. There was the afternoon of whirling snow when the waters rattled, black and forbidding, against the shore and monstrous shadows came and went as the gloom passed in and out among the mountains. The great pass into the Highlands which winds through this hollow is full of history and romance. Probably I have peopled the whirling wreaths of snow with a thousand clansmen from the west and heard again their war-pipes in the skirling and booming and droning of the gale among the cliffs high above.

Its neighbours, Katrine, Achray and Vennachar, I know in fair weather only, and apologise for my lapse of memory. They are dead-end lochs so to speak, with no through track to compare with the pass of Leny, with drove road, fighters' track, carriage route and railway alongside Loch Lubnaig to Strathyre and the Braes of Balquhiddel. Yet all was the country of the proscribed clan MacGregor, and every gorge and hollow has been used for thieving raids, murderous attacks, and for the bringing back of cattle.

Of other Perthshire lochs I must write warily for the Tummel and Garry systems are not improved by hydro-electricity installations, plethoric water reserves, appalling pipe-lines doubled and trebled, and pylons striding over glens and farms, moors and forest, to supply light and power to populations and industries in far-off places. From the mountain-tops I have looked over them all. The dark waters of Loch Rannoch were

formerly fine; it was 11 miles long, one mile wide, grandly placed with Buchaille Chue to the west, and Schiehallion's sugar loaf to the east. Since the installation of the electricity plants, I have avoided the neighbourhood. Tummel, a small fellow a league away, used to be clear and bright. Maybe it is because Schiehallion raises its proud head there—a presiding genius, a commander of mountains if Scotland holds such an office. To me mountains seem to have active powers, while lochs are passive. If you hold a different opinion, it doesn't signify. A mountain reaches out to me, but a loch simply dazzles—it beckons and then awaits your arrival. Loch Ericht in snow-time is a mighty spectacle, especially when the rose of dawn or of departing day touches Ben Alder and many others above the dense woodlands of brown larch and vivid green fir. The water is thick with half-molten snow, but this is not the day for ice. Years back I saw a timber raft held up in such conditions, there to remain till the tardy thaw-wind found its way through the mountain gorges. Which is the dreariest, most desolate and dismal of our lochs? Ericht, lying gaunt in its wilderness, may well be called the grisly queen of all. Garry, on the Perthshire tributary of that name which passes through Blair Atholl and the pass of Killiecrankie to join the Tummel, was little visited—two and a half miles long and narrow, being less than a quarter of a mile wide. The electric scheme has destroyed any attraction it may have had in the past. The loch, for its size, was comparatively deep with soundings from 105 to 113 feet. It is 1320 feet above sea level and beyond it was steep hill country.

SPEAN LOCHS

The lochs on the River Spean—chiefly Laggan and Trieg—are part of the Lochaber Hydro Electric scheme, with a 15-mile tunnel from the high-level reservoirs through the massif of Ben Nevis, and unsightly steep tubes down to the works near Fort William. I agree with some anonymous critic of Loch Trieg

A loch whom there are none to praise
And very few to love.

A less torrential Spean now flows down to Loch Linnhe, taking merely the waters of Glen Roy and the streams from the north face of the Nevis group.

SPEY: LOCH-AN-EILEAN

The River Spey on its direct course has few lochs: of these the first—Spey, a mere tarn in the lonely wilderness—is counted to be the source, fed by numerous rivulets from the further bog. A bad track goes to the lochan from the foot of Corrieyarrick Pass along the upper river, and continues over the watershed to Glen Roy. The so-called Loch Insh, north of Kingussie, is really a widening or spreading out of the river over a

flat surface in the strath. Normally three-quarters of a mile long and half a mile wide, there is also a wider area of marsh. All this is covered by floods in winter. Loch Insh is scarcely a feature in the landscape. The Monadhliadh mountains to the north of Spey (in which rise also the Findhorn and Nairn and many streams flowing to Loch Ness) hold scarcely the smallest lochs, are bare of trees, and mostly covered with grass or heather. The Cairngorms, which now compose the opposite watershed, are full of great mountain coves with fine lochs and many square miles of ancient timber.

Loch-an-Eilean, 840 feet above the sea, on the east Spey road near Aviemore, with its island and ruined castle, is completely beautiful—a show place, and one of the loveliest spots in Scotland whether you remain in the car-park or wander as far as possible through its forest of pines and beeches. The castle with its moat of living water was a stronghold, first of the Cumings, and then of the “Wolf of Badenoch” (Alexander, Earl of Buchan, son of Robert II), who burnt Elgin Cathedral in 1390. Here is a quaintly old-fashioned description:

In some parts of it, the rocky precipices rise immediately from the deep water, crowned with the dark woods that fling a profound shadow over it; in others, the solid masses of the trees advance to its edge; while elsewhere open green shores, or gravelly beaches, or low rocky points, are seen; the scattered groups or single trees, which, springing from some bank, wash their roots in the waves that curl against them, adding to the general variety of this wild and singular scene.

This lake is much embellished by an ancient castle, standing on an island within it, and even yet entire, though roofless. As a Highland castle it is of considerable dimensions; the island being scarcely larger than its foundations, it appears (in some places) to rise immediately out of the water. Its ancient celebrity is considerable, since it was one of the strongholds of the Cumings, the particular individual whose name is attached to it being the ferocious person known by the name of the Wolf of Badenoch. It has passed now to a tenant not more ferocious, who is a fit emblem and representative of the red-handed Highland chief; the eagle has built his eyrie in the castle.

So much for Dr. Macculloch, who wrote about 150 years ago. His tenant, however, has passed away, for the osprey or fish eagle which nested last in Loch-an-Eilean in Scotland has been exterminated by rapacious egg-collectors.

Loch Eunach (or more correctly Einich) is passed on one of the routes to Braeriach and other Cairngorm peaks south of the Lairig Ghru. It is a mile long and narrow and 1650 feet above sea level. Its deep basin has been partly delved by glacial action, and the lower end is held up by drift. The loch is extremely lonely, desolate and primitive, with good grass near the outlet where the Grants of Rothiemurchus used to take their cattle for summer feeding. There is a fine corrie at the south end of this loch.

MORLICH

Another beautiful and majestic loch of Spey is Morlich, 1046 feet above sea level, set on a comparatively open and comfortable ledge in Glenmore Forest. It has all the contrasts of pine woods, golden sands fringing the shore, and Cairngorm mountain with its glorious rugged corries in the background. With 300 acres it is the most extensive water in the Cairngorms but not so large as Loch Muick in the Grampians. Its overflow cuts through the woods, its gorge being deeper and deeper until it reaches the Spey north of Aviemore. All in all, Loch Morlich forms one of Scotland's greatest views. It is comparatively shallow with a great depth of 49 feet, and, like Loch-an-Eilean, has been formed in the glacial drift. The position of Loch Morlich in the heart of a Government timber reserve should save it from "development". The approaches from the Spey by car and cycle are along devious and hilly lanes. Except on foot or horseback there is no through-route beyond Forest Lodge.

AVON

The next tributary on the east of Spey is the large Avon or A'an, which rises in the vast corrie north-east of Ben Macdhui and Cairngorm, flows through Loch Avon, 2377 feet, and after a course of 45 miles enters the main stream at Ballindalloch. The loch in the upper basin is the most striking and least visited in Scotland. The best right of way to this inaccessible place is that from Abernethy by way of the Saddle, 2670 feet, on the east of Cairngorm, and there is a steep and wild stretch of travel to Glen Derry in the Dee Valley, by way of Loch Etchatan. Queen Victoria who visited it on September 28, 1861, wrote:

Nothing could be grander and wilder; the rocks are so grand and precipitous, and the snow on Ben Macdhui had such a fine effect.

The loch, which is one and a half miles long and a quarter mile broad, has trout. The shore with its black contrasts of rocks and bleak water has a crescent of yellow sand near its head. The cliffs in the upper corrie are usually spouting with waterfalls. Below the outlet the water of the River Avon is remarkably clean and pure; it flows through clear rocky country. Its depth is deceptive, and the fords and pools on that account dangerous:

The Water of A'an it rises sae clear
'Twould beguile a man o' a hunder year,

or the last line may be: 'Twould beguile a man and his meer, to the peril of both horse and rider. That excellent judge of loch scenery, Christopher North, sums up Loch Avon as "so quiet in its terrific grandeur we feel too that it is beautiful and think of its maker". The historic Shelter Stone (Clach Dhian) is the largest among an apron of fallen boulders a short walk or scramble from the head of the loch. An ancient

story-teller would have it that the cave beneath the stone would hold eighteen armed men; present-day users of the recess have proved that eight men at most can recline on the floor and only a small man can stand upright. In 1926 the dimensions of the rock were given as 43 feet by 20 feet by 22 feet, and the weight was estimated at 1361 tons.

MUICK'S CLAIMS

Like the Spey, the Dee valley east of the Cairngorm group of mountain has mere pools along its main stream. Loch Muick, in the side glen, nine miles from Ballater on the drove road to Clova, and on one of the routes up Lochnagar, seems to be the finest. It is two and a half miles long, a third of a mile wide, and 1311 feet above sea level. At this latitude, timber does not naturally succeed above the 750 feet contour. There are great masses of pines, larches and other conifers lower down the glen, and the loch has a stern grandeur in its slit of the bens. The King's mountain—Lochnagar, 3786 feet—forms a grand background, with Broad Cairn, 3268 feet, Cairn Bannoch, 3314 feet, and other summits. Round Loch Muick, the slopes are comparatively smooth, with many lateral glens in which deer find grazing.

The loch has been derided as dark and forbidding and of being cramped into a narrow trench between steep hills. The floor of the loch is flat rock, going to an extreme depth of 256 feet, and being held up by glacial drift. I have seen and enjoyed the loch under better conditions than some people, when the air has been filled with sunshine, when the great mosshags were ripe in autumn colour, and when snow touched the ridges on all sides.

This side of Lochnagar, with its glorious expanse of water, was a favourite with Queen Victoria, who took quarters in the shooting-box of Glasallt Shiel (which she had built in 1869 to take the place of a former cottage) during most autumns she spent at Balmoral. The shieling has a wild outlook over the loch and into the coves of the hills, is isolated and needs all the shelter of a fir plantation against storm blasts. Loch Muick seems to be on a noted bird-migration route for wild geese and swans are regularly noted on passage.

The Dubh Loch, 2091 feet, stands much higher on the shoulder of Lochnagar; its outflow makes a rough ladder of cascades down to Glasallt Shiel and Loch Muick. Buidhe is another lochan in the corries of Lochnagar; others stand so high that their surrounding are rarely clear of snow, and for months they are not visible.

The Don Valley in Aberdeenshire, the Deveron in Banff, the Findhorn in Elgin and the Nairn in Nairnshire have shown me no glory of lochs. Their wonders are in other directions. The famous Lochindorb is on a shelf of country between Spey and Findhorn. It is about two miles long and three-quarters wide. The castle on the island in its waters was once the stronghold of the "Wolf of Badenoch", and was twice reduced by Edwards of England—I in 1306 and III in 1336. There are plenty of legends about

the loch. Loch Spynie, near the Elgin coast, was formerly four square miles in extent. After generations of draining projects and much gain of farm lands the residue today is little more than a marsh haunted by wild-fowl. It has the ruins of a Bishop's palace. The old residence was settled here by a Papal bull in 1233. It originally consisted of a huge square tower of six storeys with turreted angles at the roof. A court was later added, protected at the three other angles by towers.

The lochan at Moy, the avenued prospect of which startles you as the trains run closer to Inverness, may not appeal when approached on foot, on a hot, steamy, dusty and insect-bitten afternoon.

NORTHERNMOST LOCHS

Beyond the Great Glen (through which the Caledonian Canal was cut to give navigation from Moray Firth to Loch Linnhe) my knowledge of the lochs has still some obvious gaps, but on foot, cycle, car or train I have reached many of them. For several days at Lairg, at the foot of Loch Shin, waiting for a car repair, I traversed most of Loch Shin. In the north and west some districts seem to be so patched that the maps show more water than land. In Sutherland, the Loch of Hope, six miles long and quite narrow, is only 12 feet above sea level and with the Pentland Firth a mile and a half away. Though so deep sunk it is not an exciting loch; on one side is the grassy western face of Ben Hope and the Eribol moors on the other. The Sutherland bens rise independently of each other: and the lochs are also scattered. Loch Loyal, four and a half miles long, which stands at 370 feet above sea level with two smaller lochs, has a grand background in many-turreted Ben Loyal. The road from Lairg through Altnaharrow to Tongue on Pentland Firth passes alongside the loch. Its outlet is the River Borgie. Loch Naver, six miles long, has also a sentinel mountain, Ben Clibric, which is much less effective than Ben Loyal. Smaller lochs, though not so numerous as in the western basin, are plentiful towards Pentland Firth. Fully a hundred of them are visible from the higher viewpoints.

Loch Watten, five miles long and one and a half broad, in the crofting area of Caithness is pleasant to look upon; its outflow goes east as the River Wick, and reaches the North Sea at that port after a run of 14 miles. Loch Calder, further west, on the Forss River system, has trout and char. Near Halkirk there are about two dozen lochs large and small. St. John's Loch, in Dunnet, in sight of the cliff which is the northernmost point in Scotland, had in old times a reputation for healing, and invalids resorted to it on St. John's Day in midsummer to bathe and be cured.

Strath Ullie, down which flows the river of Helmsdale, is famous for salmon. Its springs are on the moor about 1100 feet above sea level, but later the waters being gathered into lochs, fitted with sluices, have lost their natural setting and are tepid reservoirs to provide artificial "spates" or floods for salmon anglers.

Further south is Loch Brora, irregular of shape, three and a half miles

long and half a mile at its widest. There are three basins with 30 feet depth, and the deepest point is about 60 feet. The loch is 93 feet above sea level. Its outflow goes, in half a dozen miles, into the North Sea.

ASSYNT

The next big glen is Strath Oykeell, a system of rivers which join together and form Dornoch Firth between Sutherland and Ross, Strath Oykeell is largely a wide flat basin, at times subjected to floods. The river of that name rises in a black tarn in a horseshoe corrie near Ben More of Assynt, 3273 feet. A pretty loch in the system is Ailsh, 500 feet above sea level, half a mile square and with a wooded island. The River Shin brings down the water of an immense loch system. The first is Shin, near Lairg, the largest in Sutherland, 21 miles long and rarely more than a mile wide. It is 162 feet at its deepest, and 278 feet above sea level. The surrounding scenery is not particularly striking. The system is continued by the lochs of Merkland and Griama. Beyond Griama is the low watershed, and Lochs More and Stack drain north-west by the Laxford river into the Atlantic.

Down the western side of Sutherland and Ross-shire are sequences of glorious lochs, large and small. The Kirklaig drains Lochs Borrolan, Urigill, Veyatie and Camloch into the Minch. The Inver has a glorious, brief and joyous run of five miles from Loch Assynt to the Atlantic. Loch Assynt, seven or eight miles long, has the shapely Ben More of Assynt, 3273 feet, standing at its head, with also Quinag's broken line of peaks from 2500 to 2600 feet high. There is a well-known hotel at Inch-nadamph on the shore of the loch, and other accommodation at Lochinver. Ardvrek Castle's ruins also stand on the margin of the loch. It had three storeys, the lowest one vaulted, and was built about 1490 by the M'Leods who in the middle of the 13th century obtained Assynt by marriage. Here the Marquis of Montrose was seized in treacherous fashion in 1650 and sent to Skibo and to his death in Edinburgh. Soon after the castle passed to the McKenzies and was destroyed by fire in 1795. Only part of the old keep and turret, with a square top, remain.

Loch Lurgainn in a recess near Ullapool is desolate but has one of Scotland's best backgrounds. Mr. Arthur Gardner, the mountain photographer, suggests "with a little judicious planting to soften the austerity of the scene this lake could be made one of the chief beauties of Scotland".

MAREE

In Western Ross and along the west coast of Inverness, so many lochs have high merit that any sorting is difficult. Most of the finest are remote from roads and embedded in deer forests, grouse moors and drained by salmon rivers. Loch Maree, the largest, must be described because it is within a dozen miles of the Skye railway, and served by regular road buses. The loch is $13\frac{1}{2}$ miles long, and its widest point is just over two miles.

The 27 islands and islets make up a square mile. Maree is some 30 feet above sea level, and its greatest depth of 367 feet is 336 below the level of the sea. By many good judges this is considered far and away the most beautiful in Britain, and certainly few can rival it in wild and gentle beauty. "Utterly savage and terrific," is how Mr. Peter Anderson described it a century ago. Macculloch, who travelled here between 1811 and 1821, wrote long and enthusiastic letters to Sir Walter Scott. The day he first saw the loch, he was constrained to write:

The first day of Creation was not more beautiful. July was in its full glory, a few thin silvery clouds rested on the clear blue sky; and the sun shed a flood of light on the bright surface of Loch Maree which reflected every rock and every tree that hung over its glassy surface. No one can know the full value of summer who has not known it in a land of mountains. No one can feel that who has not felt it among such hills, the joy with which the sun can fill the mind.

Another records Maree as a noble sheet of water on which the steep and effective mountain-slopes, descending in one place directly to the margin, and in another retiring behind an interspace of fir-clad hill or almost level pasture. There is an aspect of stateliness rather than terror to other minds, while still more select the abrupt way in which the mountains shoot up, the beauty of vegetation and many trees. The water is very clear since the loch is fed by streams flowing from bare mountain rocks. During heavy rain, enormously steep little water-courses drain the very summits of the mountains, and rush their streaks of white straight down into the loch as torrents descend the sides of Norwegian fjords.

Other characteristic lochs near Maree are Fionn (white), six miles long and 538 feet above sea level; its islands are named after the great birds which used to haunt them—Eagle, small and low (where the white-tailed eagle nested within a living memory); Iasgair (osprey's rock), also heron. Fionn was the loch of mighty trout, specimens of a dozen pounds and more being taken. Loch Fada lies to the north-east and runs parallel to Loch Maree for four miles; others are Kernsary, A' Bhaid Luachraich and Na Sheallag. The outlet of Maree, the River Ewe, reaches the Atlantic in a couple of miles.

ARKAIG

In my very youthful days, mountaineering on the snows and the rock towers of Ben Nevis and his 4000 feet satellites claimed all my attention. The minute the train stopped at Fort William eyes were fixed on the high peaks, and only darkness sent back the wearied one. If there was storm, it would be bad enough to close Lochaber as well as the Ben to us. The last possible train took us back, travelling through the night. Comparatively late, I began to explore the Locheil country of which I had had magnificent bird's-eye views. The country with its lochs and rivers is

rather complicated. The southernmost on the Caledonian Canal—a waterway which extends from Corpach at the corner of Loch Linnhe to Inverness by way of Lochs Lochy, Oich and Ness—is the Lochy, 10 miles long and one wide, and 93 feet above sea level. The outflow of this escapes at Gairlochy into the floor of the Great Glen, is joined at right angles by the River Spean, and enters Loch Linnhe close to Fort William. Two miles to the west of Loch Lochy, at an acute angle and reached by a narrow stream of water and a picturesque gorge, is Loch Arkaig, 13 miles long and 140 feet above the sea. This is Locheil—Cameron country. Here Bonnie Prince Charlie was entertained when he arrived almost alone from France in August 1745; here the standard was raised, and 800 men from the country went out in the perilous enterprise which ended in disaster at Culloden, near Inverness, in the April following. Here the fugitive Prince was guarded and passed from one safe place to another though a price of £30,000 was on his head, and the Cameron country was ravished with fire and sword. Achnacarry House, which had entertained the Prince, was burnt by the Duke of Cumberland. At the head of the loch a military barracks was built, a lonely and remote place only occupied for six months. Despite this, the Prince was moved here and there, and ultimately a French ship arrived at Borodale, and the Prince, with the proscribed Locheil and some principal officers, were taken away. Beyond the loch, the upper glen, which once had a large clan population, is sheer wilderness. There is hardly a shed in either Glen Dessary and Glen Pean, and the rights-of-way are in danger of lapsing from disuse.

According to Professor John Wilson (Christopher North, friend and champion of Wordsworth):

The scenery of the valley separating Loch Arkaig from Loch Lochy is very similar to that of the Trossachs; through it there are two approaches to the loch, and the *Mile-Dubh*, or the dark mile, according to our feeling, is more impressive than any part of the approach to Loch Katrine. . . . The loch, more or less sylvan from end to end, shows on the nearest shores some magnificent remains of the ancient forest, and makes a noble sweep like some great river. There may be more, but we remember one island—not large, but wooded as it should be—the burying place of the family of Locheil. What rest!

One tree in the Dark Mile is named after Prince Charles, and is near a cave where he hid. The spot is of exceptional beauty. The loch will always be associated with the Prince, who shone out at his best in the times of hardship that followed the fatal field, and who showed that though bred in courts, he was as much at home as Locheil in his wild lochside quarters.

NESS

The remaining lochs of our survey drain into Moray Firth—either through the Ness, Beauly or Conon (Cromarty Firth). The nearest and most accessible, Loch Ness, is also the largest. Starting about six miles

from Inverness its trough extends for 24 miles, about a mile wide, with steep edges which drop to an extreme depth of 900 feet, and much of the floor is 600 feet down. Steamers pass along the loch with piers at various points including Temple pier, where Urquhart Castle (mainly built by Edward I on a more ancient site) overlooks the bay, and Foyers where the once-celebrated falls have been diverted to supply electric power to aluminium factories; Invermoriston at the foot of Glen Moriston and a point on the old coach road from Inverness to Skye. The voyage is satisfying and pleasing rather than sensational though the "Loch Ness Monster" has disturbed the shore! The glens, forests, and outstanding bens are sufficiently near the lake to be interesting. As Fort Augustus is approached the loch narrows. The Abbey now occupies the site of the fort which was built after the Rebellion of 1715, and enlarged by General Wade in 1730. In addition to guarding the head of the loch and being part of the Great Glen defences, Fort Augustus commanded the crossing place of the drove road along which ponies and cattle were sent from the Hebridean coast to the markets at Falkirk, an important source of food supplies and of money. The loch has roads up either bank, and that on the north is close to the shore. The southern road has to climb the high land behind Foyers and come down the still steep Glen Doe pass.

The river at the head of Loch Ness is known as the Oich, and continues six miles along the trench of the Great Glen to the Loch of the same name. This is four miles long, and 105 feet above sea level, a narrow and straight stretch with rich and varied woods, the summit of the Caledonian Canal. The utmost depth is 120 feet, but mostly it is shallow under 20 feet. Above Loch Oich the river is called the Garry, and has two important lochs, Garry and Quoich with Poulary, a series of expansions of the river rather than a loch, covering a mile and a half of the strath. Loch Garry is five miles long, half a mile at the widest and 257 feet above the sea. Its scenery is not equal in grandeur to Arkaig over the hills due west, but it is surpassing fair. Loch Quoich, six and a half miles long and 355 feet above the sea, occupies part of the glen of Garry and is seven and a half miles above the loch. According to meteorological statistics, the annual rainfall in this area is extremely heavy, and the highest figures for the British mainland are often claimed for the Loch Quoich and Arkaig stations.

North-east of the Garry river and flowing into Glen Moriston are two fine lochs—Loyne and Clunie. The river Moriston has a magnificent course of 25 miles before reaching Loch Ness at Invermoriston half-way between Fort Augustus and Inverness. A good main road goes down Glen Moriston, but the rest of the routes about Garry, Loyne and Clunie are narrow, steep and never particularly good.

Of the Canon lochs, Luichart discharged its waters over a high and beautiful cascade, quite close to the main road to Strathcarron and the West Coast. The loch itself is five miles long, a mile wide, with a greatest depth of 164 feet.

Loch Garve is near road and railway, and so is Loch Rosque, to the

west of Achnasheen. Other lochs are deep in Scotland of the deer forest, grouse moor or salmon water, in recesses rarely accessible to wanderers. Loch Fannich, further up the Grudie river above Loch Luichart, is typical; so are Glass and Morie behind Ben Wyvis.

Of the Beauly Firth lochs, the most beautiful are at dead-ends of public roads in Glen Affric and Glen Cannich. Glen Strathfarrar has mainly tracks to deer forest lodges with wild Loch Monar at the head. This is seven miles long, and 663 feet above sea level. Its shores are wild. At the eastern end where the water is narrowed and picturesque, the remnants of a pine forest are visible. About the loch's southern side towers Sgurr-na-Lapaich. Mails for Patt, a crossing place of several ancient tracks, are conveyed by launch from the foot of Monar to that point. In the old time Patt was a stage in the route from the Hebrides to the fishing ports on the Moray Firth. Hebridean workers walked east when the herring were due, and returned west with their hardly-earned wages. Of Loch Monar trout, General Crealock wrote: "They are the best trout I have ever tasted, pink and fine as a salmon; and whether for use, size, beauty, numbers, or flavour, I have never seen them equalled in any water in Scotland." There is no driving road beyond Monar Lodge, yet the forest is comparatively easy to work by boats on the loch and by pony paths. Strathmore Lodge, a smaller house, is at the west end of Monar. There are several important rights-of-way—one from Achnashellach, in the Strome glen, being used as a drove-road for cattle from the Lews and Hebrides; another strikes west from Patt to Killilan, on Loch Long.

CHAPTER III

SONG OF MANY WATERS

From Tweed to Brora—Spate Music.

FROM Tweed to Brora is a far cry. I have heard the music of many waters and aver that every one of our rivers has its own song. In the darkest hour the brawling of the Spey cannot be confused with the melody of the Tweed, the soft purling of the Forth with the murmur of Ythan, the sobbing chorus of the Dee with the majestic music of Tay.

From the moors beyond Peebles away down to Berwick, the Tweed changes not its tune. Certainly the refrain swells and falls ; it quickens, races, diminishes, slacks, but it never halts. The song ages and mellows with the length of the way. Streams come in from Cheviot and from Lammermuir without breaking, even for a mile, the constancy of the music. The silent Till is indeed the only stream which retains its character to the very edge of Tweed. The others come early within the magnetism of the great main river. The thin warble as the rivulet escapes from the moorland bogs becomes a mighty diapason, a veritable organ-swell as the mature flood sweeps through the lower salmon pools and then blends its voice in the mystic chorus of the sea. Tweed possesses true Scottish energy. It is never reckless of strength, never boisterous in rejoicing, never extravagant in desire or despair. Crags and ramparts of rock in its course exist, but to be assailed, turned, and worn away. Tweed never wanders far, never slinks aside to avoid an obstacle. Its every curve is strong and full of purpose. Down the slopes of bare rock glides the river ; down the gap where it has pounded the boulders into a ladder it thunders and tumbles. Even in its sternest hour, Tweed never forgets its pride, its dour purpose, its ancient respectability. If the inland rains command a rise, a rise there must be, but the river is swift to withdraw to its own domain. There is no mad riot, no surly sweeps over unresisting plains.

In this matter the Forth is a far different stream. Some waters from Balquhider roar and foam down the pass of Leny. There is a merry lilt, a sportive dashing as the stream dances away down to the foot of the Trossachs. Here the Teith flows swift, clear and strong. But when all the streams from west and south and north reach the carse of Stirling, the Forth welds them into a river of muted voice. So minor is the lay that on a summer afternoon, a long pause, a sustained waiting and listening is necessary by the Old Bridge before the waters show even the feeblest message. Even in winter, in flood-time, Forth itself believes little in hurry, in sound. When the mountain torrents overcharge the river bed, the extra volume spreads slowly, creeps lazily over meadow and ploughland. And when the stress is over, the flood seems just as unwilling to depart.

Great pools and basins lie about for days, then soak tardily into the fields as the drains again come into operation.

The song of Tay is for the most part more boisterous, merry and less responsible than either Tweed or Forth. The former is proud, the regnant stream of a fighting Border, its ford the historic assembling place for armies in battle array. The Forth, looking up at Scotland's royal fortress, is more placid in its loyalty. Tay flows through wild country, though its lower course compares well for fertility with either the carse of Stirling or the merse of Berwick. I have heard the infant Tay singing softly through the snowdrifts on Ben Lui, and heard against its roar, as after its hours of check, it hurls its foaming, vicious force against the tide, and harries back the sea-water mile after mile. As the Dochart it chafes and splits past the rock island at Killin, which forms the last resting place of the Chiefs of MacNab. As full Tay it drains away from the great loch to pass through woodlands and pleasant pastures towards the sea.

Tay is, however, scarcely constant in its music. Even the main current sees many changes. It bickers down the old forest of Central Scotland to become almost mute in Strath Fillan; it shouts again with joy as it passes from the twin lochans with the memories of Robert Bruce and John of Lorne. Its voice is lost altogether in Loch Tay. But the worst is still to come. There is a sad hour when riotous Garry, swift from the steep plunge of Killiecrankie and with the addition of Tummel's brawling stream, overwhelms the quieter stream (even though it be really the mother) and hurls it along in spume and fury. But the genius of old Tay, though hustled aside for a moment, gradually reasserts power, and in time vanquishes completely the turbulent intruders from the wild glens, the bens and lochs of the Grampians.

From source to mouth Tay is magnificent. Its surroundings are tinged with romance; it is a river system with a past. For decades the population of its glens has been shrinking; the higher standards of life, of work and of pleasure elsewhere have tempted away its sons and daughters. Yet the Tay, the Lyon, the Tummel, the Garry, the Isla and the Earn have implanted in each heart a song: "We haste away, yet truly, and for ever will we desire to return".

The Dee of Aberdeenshire marks a transition. It has come through a land of standing pines, of tall larches and spruces, of wild red deer and grouse and ptarmigan, through the sporting domains of kings and princes, queens and princesses. Yet the song of Dee is humble; there is far more of royal pride in Tweed. There is in Dee an undercurrent of heavy music, but it is broken. It has not the full round voice of the Border stream, nor the muted cadences which mark the many lochs in the song of Tay. There is a hint, too, of the green pine woods which change neither winter nor summer. Tweed lives buoyantly through the bronze and rich green of oaks, which change their radiance with the passing of the seasons.

The voice of Dee has always the harsh croaking of melting snow, the eagle's wild cry, the raven's croak for carrion. The lofty mountains about

the springs of the river hold great drifts and masses all through the year. Its flood song is mighty and continuous—continuous not with the sullen swelling of Forth, but with a rich quality of its own drawn from the thousands of forest acres where the rootlets hold back and steady the flow of storm-water. I have listened to the music of Dee as the young stream rattled past the foot of Cairn Toul and avoided the steep pike of the Devil's Pike, and it has changed only in volume except that a sobbing, dragging undertone has been added by the waterfalls, narrows and rock-ladders when the river bids us farewell at the harbour bar of Aberdeen.

As regards the twin river of the Granite city, the Don, its note is far to seek. The old saying:

A mile o' Don's worth twa o' Dee
Except for salmon, stone and tree,

might add music as well. The Don rises at 1640 feet on the shoulder of Ben Avon, while the Dee's source is over the 4000 feet contour. Within a few miles, cattle pasture beside the Don at Cock Bridge and Corgarff. Further down, Kinture, Inverurie and the vale of Alford have the rich deep loam which forms the finest farmland; though many parishes are practically level there should at least be the song of a trout stream. For a century and a half the Don has been polluted by many works and factories of paper and wool, and the pollution chokes all efforts at melody. Even heavy rain in winter or thaw on the Cairngorms in spring floods the nether Don without giving the stream the power of expression. To put it in other words, the result is dumbness. The Don does not weep; indeed no great river of Scotland sobs its way in the manner of certain streams of Wales and Ireland.

Spey is merely a huge torrent: its last level sweeps through Moray check not the rough glory of its voice. I have heard the midnight shouting of the river across miles of dark pines and found pleasure in the sound. There is no snarl in the song, whether heard at Aviemore or out where Spey falls into the sea beyond Fochabers. It is just a devil-may-care lilt, the pipes played by a youth to whom strength has been abundantly given, but not yet the experience of war. Spey never reaches discretion. It is a river of mad pranks, of strong buffetings, of fords where the rushing water and the slippery boulders seek, without mercy, to overwhelm both horse and rider. Spey has little of the loch music in its song. The sobs and crashes are those of surging waterfalls, of cascades, of rock-ladders. There is a long hastening down the glens, there is a swift rush through the pine forests, there is a sudden swirl as a great boulder bars the way, as the bar in the shingle sways the current this way and that.

Though the Ness is but a fragment of flowing water, it represents the tribute of a mighty land of mountains, of long glens, of a skein of lochs. From Glen Garry, from Glen Morriston, from Glen Urquhart, from the Glen Doe, from Foyers, the great streams rush into Loch Ness, and that

wavering, crashing note which runs through the long cadences is a memory of the thunder-chasm of Foyers. In former times there was no wavering in that staccato note; the great fall has been robbed of most of its waters, and it is only in winter, when the dams are overflowing, that the sound can be discovered.

Of the northern torrents, there is Beaully and Conon; there is Carron and Oyckell, there is Shin from the heart of Sutherland. And last of all is Brora, typical of the sterile north. There is little of fertility, of verdure now in the straths, less even of grass, and on some hill-tops even heather fails. The song of the waters is in accord with surroundings. The Brora, even on a summer day, has nothing of the lilt and laugh of the southland: its minor voices are but those of a torrent hushed by drought. Forest trees are scarce, a wild melancholy solitude hangs over the high ground. Can it be that Brora should be anything but gloomy? But the river speaks the high bravery of the north. Its gloom is a mere mask over the nobler song. Brora is a true warrior to whom tears and moanings are but memories of childhood days.

SPATE MUSIC

During winter flood the individuality of Scottish rivers is worth study. They vary at any time from those of any part of England; in spate there is a complete revolution. The Tweed of the Border becomes awful, and, given the chance, it would soon falsify the bloodthirsty observation of its tributary, the Till:

Though ye rin wi' speed,
An' I rin slaw,
Yet where ye drown ae man
I drown twa!

Tay, in its lower stretches, waxes stately, rising up its banks and floating across water meadows, but up in Glen Falloch in flood time she is a harridan, leaping in terrific masses of white foam down the rocks. The lake pool of 20 miles tames her fury a little. And so it goes with the rest of Scottish flood. Spey is murderous; Findhorn treacherous with her floods coming down like a wall and washing away startled sheep. Never trust a ford or eddy on Findhorn River on a day when storms are breaking among the bens at its source. Spean is magnificent though the course is short; Garry brawls alongside the great tribal way through Atholl and Badenoch; Tummel rages from the Rannoch Moor, and so on through half a hundred more. I have tested their waters again and again, and they are menacing. There seems one river in contrast: the Yarrow of Wordsworth never raises its murmur to anger. The sound rises instead to mournful wails, and intensify the silence of its love-lorn, ballad-haunted banks. In the worst of weather its kelpies never lose their syren sweetness of song.





In winter storm the rivers of the far Highlands are terrible to look at; every whirlpool seems to be a place of torment. I like the Dee better when the flood is subsiding, and when it is accurate to declare:

Music o' bonny Dee as't cantly rummles doon,
Purlin' wi' lauchter whiles, an' syne a froon,
Flirtin' in eddies, kissin' mossy stanes,
Skirlin' agin like happy skule-free weans.

For the most part a river spate is merely an outburst of pouting temper which can easily be forgiven and forgotten. A cloud-burst among the moors and bens, however, may cause a river to change its character. This was the case with the Findhorn and Nairn rivers a century ago when great floods ravaged the countryside and gave a new sea-entrance to the former river.

Fifty years ago the Borgie river of Sutherland ran down its own peaceful strath to the Pentland Firth in a deep channel 15 to 25 feet wide. It was a grand angling stream with pools for salmon and grilse and brisk riffles where good trout abounded. Then came a raving deluge. Three clouds trysted together on Ben Loyal, and the yellow torrent 200 yards wide which swept from the corries swept out the old river channel, filled up the pools, and ruined the angling altogether. The new channel was double the old width; the water was shallow; no halting places for the fish remained. All the trout caught in the lower part of the river for a month after the spate were silvery like sea-trout. No doubt they had been swept bodily down within the tidal influence, and the brackish water had affected their scales before they could return.

The man or woman who only knows the rivers of Scotland in high summer when the meagre rains merely discolour and lift the surface six inches at most, knows nothing of the real spirit of Highland waters. They must hear them bursting among the rocks, rising a fathom in a day, throwing vast clouds of spray among the woods, and giving out the wildest song Nature has to sing.

CHAPTER IV

EVENING GLOOM AND TWILIGHT GLORY: SUNRISE AND EARLY DAY

NOT a breath of air steals down the strath to aid our fishing, to temper the fierce heat of the morning. Long ago the oars were laid aside, the rods are idle. The reek of Donald's pipe curls up as though ashamed of its activity—it seems ages since he spoke. Silent is everything out here on the loch, the brooks have ceased their murmur, and never a ripple kisses past the timbers of the boat. And so I write!

Sometimes I tire of the unchanging blazing days of early summer, of glassy lochs, sweltering glens, dusty bogs, tepid burns, of mountain ridges where the air is flat and calm. But never of the nights! Though the sun goes beneath the horizon there is little of gloom, nothing of actual darkness. Years ago I suffered gaily to walk along stony paths in broiling heat, rowed along the still waters, and herded into public conveyances. But now I am wiser. As a person accepted of the gods of mountain, burn and loch, I wander, fish, row in the cool hours between sunset and sunrise, and each summer the pleasure becomes keener by contrast. Nature's day is 16 hours of activity to eight of rest, and from nine of the morn to five afternoon is given over almost entirely to rest and sleep.

I have stood alone, or with thee, brother of the mountain, in the "last hour of the morning watch" on many a summit in Cumbria, Wales, the Highlands. At no time does the peace and joy of the Eternal so strongly impress the soil. There is majesty in the thunder rolling among the crags; there is glory in the sunburst which finds glen and hills robed in dull ivory of winter snow and changes it into a garment of flashing silver. There is charm in the light and shade of April; beauty in the green vision of May when the lochs again take on the blue lost to them in winter. But the mountains in the dark silence preceding dawn speak in more awe-inspiring, more solemn, more heart-lifting manner than any of them.

Do you still remember that gloaming when by its north-eastern buttress we scrambled up the lofty ben? Ah! that was the time of times. How sweetly, how blithely the larks, the thrushes, the blackbirds and starlings sang their melodies as we walked up the strath and faced the hills eternal. The heat, past and gone, the sheep ventured out from their shelters behind banks and fences, the red deer browsed slowly, serenely from their retreat among bog and heather, the roes timidly tripped out from the shadowed plantations. And the sweet scent of wild rose mingled with that of heather, the pine trees sent out afresh their fragrance, the flower-strewn meadows perfumed and brightened the strath with colour; beauties, scents, which two hours syne were choked in the heat. Fritil-

laries, moths, wild bees, danced, glowed, bowed, towered in the warm air, rejoicing anew in life.

How short seemed the miles of road! There was the golden flame of gorse and whin—and the light of eventide mellowing the ancient burial place across the glen, fingering anew the nameless mossy ruin, touching the lichened monuments, even, as it passed, brightening the sombre guardian yews. We felt that Death was indeed masked in peace, that the rill bursting and glinting past the last earthly habitation of men and women spoke: "We came, we passed: you come, you pass. In due time we shall all rise again". I love that touch of sincerity and confidence, and treasure the message of the eventide.

And then, brother, we came to the threshold of the hills, to the home of the black grouse and the red, to the bosky haunt of the lonely snipe, to the bogs over which the curlew makes everlasting lament, and the golden plover have always a silver ripple of song. The wheel-road ended abruptly at the cluther of sheep-folds, and henceforth a mere cattle-track guided us in and out of the heathery knolls, between yellow or grey cushions of bog-moss, through masses of reeds and thin water grasses. The dragon-fly, the gnat, the midge were still awake, droning and persecuting. The former feasts on the two others; the gnat and midge less mercifully on us humans. Twice, as we passed the tiny plantations, there was the sharp flicker of bats on the wind. No wonder! For the big night beetles were soaring in myriads, and again and again a sharp "pit" on face or hand proved the blundering of their flight. A large beetle struggling inside a collar is not a pleasure—how its legs cling and scratch, how it clutches, struggles. Further south, at such an evening, the night-jar would be rousing the heather with its churr. But somehow we never heard a night-jar on the moor behind the ben, did we?

Did you notice that the comb of the mountain rose higher, sharper, more defiant, against the crimsoned sky? No—for the path was vile—stony, full of holes—the feet had to be placed carefully indeed. Then there was the big stone by the lochan, that landmark three hours from home where we halted for food with our climb still to begin. We had passed from the level fields of the strath to the heathery wastes of the glen, and were now passing the last trees—gnarled thorns, twisted yews and short but sturdy pines. In front was the wilderness, a corrie set with rocks and fenced round with mighty cliffs. Should we have considered our route up the dark-visaged giant? Anyway we did not. The beauty around was too seductive. The last glimmer of the setting sun just painted in gold the sky above the mountain, and this glory was reflected by the still lochan at our feet. Above, two great horns of mountain—Ben of the Lochan and Ben of the Deer Corrie—curved back to the great tower, the highest of all. The evening was still, so still that the droning of night insects could be heard afar, and the splash as a trout fell back from its leap was a disturbing tumult. The fishes were in playful mood, leaping far and high; in widening circles the ripples fell away, away. There was nothing of the

strong yet furtive wimple which the truly-feeding trout makes in forcing its nose just through the water-skin to capture some desirable fly which has just fluttered down and is resting daintily, jauntily, as though the water were *terra firma* indeed. It was here that the last lark tumbled down from its ladder to the sunset, piping, fluting singing, until within a 100 feet of earth it closed wings and dropped like a stone to the grassy tuft by which its nest was hidden.

Then on again, by the shore of the lochan. That low and broken wall, you remember. It is the only sign of the shielings where in days gone by the milk-maids dwelt during the summer while their hardy, shaggy kine lived well on the rich mountain grass. Gaelic songs and music are full of allusions to love idylls at these rough dwellings where, on the Sabbaths, the lasses were visited by their lads from the farms in the strath below. But the ben is a deer forest now, and that rustle is of a herd moving through the heather and grass as we come near. See, there they are—crossing the burn just at the foot of the pool, just where the light gleams along the water. Stags, hinds, calves going away leisurely for they know that there is no danger from us. Yet I would fain see again those shielings occupied, and the dark brown cattle winding in and out of their paths to the upper corrie and even to the summit itself.

A half-hour more and the sunset glow had wheeled up the hills; no longer the fingers of rose and gold touched the heights. Yet night, darkness, withheld its homely curtain from this place. Forward goes the path, more broken, less distinct now that the place of the shielings is passed, forward into that brown indefinite gloom which is both evening and night. Beyond the lochan do you remember how many times the path led us into stony burn-courses, into soft, mossy bogs? And ah! do you remember that delayed conference when, with an uncompromising brown wall in front, each asked "Which way?" Had we come too far, had we come far enough, where was the side corrie, where the pile of great boulders which marked the easier approach to the summit? I still believe, and so do you, though you never confess, that we were within the jaws of the deer corrie, and that the summits which you claimed still to be Ben of the Lochan and Ben of the Deer Corrie, were mere rock-towers less than half a mile apart.

Now this evening gloom which fills the hours between sunset and sunrise has curious qualities and properties: you may read your watch and compass easily and yet have a bewildering wall of indefinite scenery in front. In that way, brother, we climbed forward—now in the heather, now in the fern, and now on the screes and up dim-seen spits of grass. We rose rapidly; and then it was that Ben of the Lochan flung up its cone of blue to our right, and Ben of the Deer Corrie was to our left; the other peaks were far below. The way had been hopelessly lost, but what matter? We were high on the buttress of our real peak, and to search for an easy path would mean a long descent and a traverse far to the right. So, ahead! The grass sloped steeper, and we came to ledges, to short steps of rock—to what? From left and from right the rock ridges crowded closer, and

between their dark walls appeared a mere ladder, a stone shoot. By day we would not have been tempted, as no doubt the swifter, easier progress was along the ridges. But at night the obvious is preferable. In such circumstances we spent an hour on a Coolin ridge, trying to find a way up a rock-pile not 20 feet high and ridiculously easy really.

The stone-shoot was merely hard work, though an incautious movement started a ton or so of loose material, for five minutes we clung to the rocks and listened to the fragments clinking and crashing down the steep upper corrie. Another, too, was disturbed, for, with a mighty yell, a great eagle sprang from its roost in the crag, swung out across the sky, and then circled up, up, calling, calling that there were strangers even in this wilderness. And before it had reached the height, another eagle flew out to bear it company. The look down the stone-shoot was rather sensational, provided the mind forgot the distortion of twilight. It seemed as though we were clinging on precarious fragments of loose rock on the very edge of an abyss cloven in cliffs and so deep that the blue vapour of distance hid the glen beneath. However the situation was really safe enough. Soon a side gully gave us a way to the ridge, and our difficulties seemed to be over. For outside the shadow of the great Ben, where the glow of the sky could reach us, there was light which would not disgrace a noon of February when the clouds pack close to the summits of the hills. Of course, we were far from the correct path, but with easy scrambling what did such a detail matter? Then, brother, you remember a rock tower, which later our Alpine friends called, in derision, the Gendarme, the policeman. Did not its slabby front and overshot sides daunt our hearts? Like a mighty tooth it rose where the ridge was narrowest and completely barred the way. To right, to left, its sides overhung terrific precipices, and in the gloom its lofty crest seemed to bend towards us. Memories of other ridges, other towers, kept us moving—say the frieze of towers which seem to end the narrow ridge of Crib Goch and to order away he who would intrude on that majestic giant of Wales, Snowdon.

When we approached the gloomy gendarme, we found a broad ledge passing him, practically on a level with our ridge. Then on, without a pause, without a halt, for there, against the faint starred sky, is the steep, shapely head of great Ben himself, a pleasant vision after our six easy hours of ramble and scramble.

Since writing the foregoing, brother, I have used much good note-paper; who indeed can describe that flood of mountains we saw in the summer twilight? There was one fine fellow with a mane of white, like a wave which has just thrown its crest, the white of a patch of quarts and not of snow. There were graceful cones and spires, level summits and rugged slans. But above all, beyond all, through all, the strange glamour of the twilight. And just beneath our feet was a film of blue vapour, through which lochs large and small looked upward, grim and cold, to the tiny insects by the cairn of topmost Ben. Here and there a glen broke through the mountains, and away to the west was the purple, all-embrac-

ing sea with its rock islets and peaceful holms, and the tangle which is the country of the sea-lochs. Brother, who can write of this and be believed? If others wish, let them pierce the corrie, scramble up the rock-ridge, and then witness with us the glory of the bens in summer twilight. They will remember the frozen silence, the barrenness, the wilderness, until the end of their days.

Such the night, but what of the morning.

SUNRISE AND EARLY DAY

I asked, brother, what of the morning? To dally on the ridges until the gloom of the summer night closes around, until the deer sink themselves to rest in the grassy dips and the beds of bracken, until the last eagle has screamed farewell to the dying primrose sunset, until the red grouse and the blackcock have clucked themselves to sleep among the juniper and the heather—such is but an incident in any summer. And, soft in your ear, you remember that week around the loch of lochs, when to the hotel-lovers there was rain after breakfast, much rain after lunch, a heavy thunderstorm with rain-torrents in the afternoon, and the hour of dinner split into unusable portions the calm evening which followed the storm.

Yet out in our dingy tent we proclaimed the period as one of delight. How sweet is liberty! For us the sun set fair and the sun rose fair. We had the key of the hills and might unlock their treasures when we chose. And so we chose to sleep during hours of rain, to ramble and to scramble when the murmurous rattle of drops on the tent's flysheet ceased. From behind thick plate glass the hotel guests saw dimly the grey triangle in the meadow and seeing no sign of miserable occupants they decided that we had been "drowned out". But on that evening before we returned to the treadmill of commerce and journalism, we adjourned to their mighty caravanserai to dine together for the last evening. And our stories of glorious evenings and splendid dawns were received with many marvellings and mighty little belief. No month is evil of weather throughout; pretty often wild nights succeed glorious days.

There are sunrises remembered for their glory; and sunrises remembered for their gloom. A night of brilliant star-shine has ere now ended in a wild shouting of gale and a flurry of snow. And on the skirts of a cloudy midnight has travelled a sunrise of unsurpassed radiance. The only sunrises I forget are those perfect ones, which travel with magic-lantern precision and have not a kick in them.

The worst of all sunrises was to a tiny party benighted on a tiny ledge in a great rock-face when the night of cloud gave way to a dawn of rain and the snow-slopes were big and steep. A clip of the axe, and it was through to something akin to ice, where only infinite labour could hack a step safe for a mountaineer. Not all sunrises are of the mountains, though there is found the utmost glory, the contrasting gloom, the hardest storms, the finest glimpses into that world which seems to border earth and heaven, and which is surely the Great Unknown. Out at sea, one is

rarely exposed to the discomforts of the elements, a retreat into the shelter of cabin or even under the corner of a sail fastened along the thwarts is generally possible. The skyward views are more extensive—there is a mightier expanse of air and cloud, but the boat is too lowly placed to command a memorable view of the bosom of the waters. From the crow's-nest of a great liner coming up or down the Firth of Clyde a little can be seen of the blue and the purple, the green and silver of tides—colour in patches, in shadows, in streaks and belts and streams. From the shore-cliff the view is a foretaste of the charm of the high bens; the cliff itself is commanded from landward by a mightier summit until from the cairn on the height of the island, the majesty of a landscape is bounded with mountains in whose laps lie the sea.

No, the true beauty of the sunrise is ever of the high places, ever where we have loved to roam. Sunrise in autumn, with the woods and lower summits a blaze of glory, of gold and bronze, of ruddy fire and silver. Sunrise in winter with rosy fingers touching the snow slopes, with gleams of blue struck from the ice-mask of the rocks. Sunrise in spring when the woods and fields are delicate green, and the deer wander back to the great corries hidden in the mountains. Sunrise in summer—sunrise in summer. There was that from the Welsh mountains which like a spire rises from a wilderness of boulders, which gives a fine view through the portal of rocks southward to the sandy bay and then northward over the lesser hills to where the great steamers pass in and out of the Mersey. That was a morning of silver and blue and grey—of a sun which rose but did not break through the cloud banks to the east. And there was sunrise from that beacon, the view extending over many counties of central England and bounded in every direction by low hills with never the blue sheet of a lake or the flashing corner of a stream to relieve the monotony. Such a view was more of a novelty than a wonder.

Then came a succession of sunrises among the Pennines—featureless plateaus with high-sounding names for the most part, but with scarcely a patch of scree and few rocks. Yet one night we were astonished for a feather of mist crept up the edge of the moor and hey presto! there was a great cone of rock. Surely here was adventure, discovery at last. But in the sober light of day not a trace of the fearsome pinnacle could be found—it was but a climb in the clouds after all. Up near the Border the hills are more rugged, consequently their climbing gives greater sport, but the absence of all water except the grey and distant Solway, and the North Sea, rather mars the chance of discovering at dawn a new world in the mists of an old one. Out in Cumbria there are rocky peaks in dozens; the narrow and deep dales, the sharp ridges, the lakes curving and bending, the mountain tarns set like diamonds at the throats and on the shoulders of rough giants, and the sea not too far away to give a blue boundary to the outer plains, provide a zest, a sharpness which is delightful. After the clumsy peaks and flattened valleys of the Pennines, there was a cheeriness, a welcome, unspoken maybe, but still felt.

It is in Scotland that the most beautiful of sunrises may be witnessed, far north, where, at midsummer, there is no darkness, where from sunset to sunrise is but a few hours indeed. There, O brother, it was my privilege to see the new day from that peak of our desire, that peak which in the past had always been closed. Storm and short holidays conspired to prevent the attack. Alone I have come up the steep brae, through the boggy corrie, up and up the shoulder of the hills to get at grips with the final slope—just where in a day long past the snow was too deep and loose for our effort to meet with success. As usual went the night scramble. The tiny lochan on the saddle where buttress joins mountain appeared awhile over the broken rocks as one stepping upwards, turned to note progress. Then I was forced into a great corridor between mighty cliffs, steep but easy; the rock-pyre from which the cairn glances proudly over great gulfs miscalled glens went more easily than expected. There was no groping for knobs and cracks to win over a short but steep cliff, for this corridor merely narrowed and steepened to an easy ladder of jammed stones. And as usual passed the time until dawn. Dawn with the steel-blue fetter across the zenith, dawn with the fading stars, dawn with its rim of silver to the east, with the western mountains darkening more distinctly so that the greater rifts in their walls were visible, with the lochs melting from the hard ebony of midnight to the more genial aspect of a new day. Here and there wandered white feathers of cloud, now up, now down, now curving into the width of a sea-loch, anon creeping silently and slowly up a rough ridge, through deep gaps in the mountain wall, swirling round to caress the topmost stones of some soaring peak, before they hid themselves away, dissipating to a mere wisp of grey and, passing inland, rolling up into a full sheet to trail over some cold lofty moor many a mile away.

And after dawn, the rising of the grey light, is the coming of the sun and the lights of rose and bright gold. But, here this was well begun, behold a change. Some wayward breath from the Atlantic huddles together a handful of the white cloud feathers. There they come, obedient to its whim, more and more and still more until the hollow at one's feet is floored with them. The long dark loch, the pool among the lower rocks, disappeared, and up, up, up rises a very flood of vapour until the ridges connecting this peak with its buttress summits disappear. And higher, yet higher, until the subsidiary peaks drop out of sight in order of their altitude, until at last the twin peak to this, a mile away and forty feet lower, remains to represent the solid world. And the river of fleecy vapour flows round, and past, blotting out glens and lochs near at hand, then passing to the great masses of mountain between this summit and the rising day. The feathers became packed together like billows on a wind-tortured estuary, the breeze hurried them on ever faster, ever deeper, for where once was a shifting veil now hiding, now showing the heights and the depths, was now a sheet of pure but impenetrable white.

Then the breeze from the west soughed faster, but the fleecy torrent

could not keep pace. It was damned here, divided there by the great ridge. So into the free air above was forced, pile upon pile, tower and battlement and spire of cloud, just as the ice on a torrent jams among the rocks in front, and the great plates following are compelled to charge, to mount, to rise over the solid obstacle. Sometimes one of these aerial seracs would do battle with a fast-footed summit, bury it from sight for a few moments, and then pass on, leaving no sign of its shock behind.

The east is now rimmed in fire of gold; huge shafts of glory rush up the sky, and the few flakes of cloud flying through the upper air are fierce red, or crimson or rose. The glory of the coming day is written in symbols of gold on the white vapour around. This caern and its rock platform alone rise superior to the stream for its eastern edge has trailed out and out and out to the far horizon, leaving only the crests of the highest bens in view. And now a bright rim appears, grows larger, larger. The light around is more powerful, its shadows grow deeper, and the level floor of brilliant mist turns into a glory of wave-crests with grey belts beneath. The change is sudden, impressive. The towers of cloud, which but a few minutes past seemed so solid are now run through with spears and arrows of light; the spires are attenuated until the blue skies appear beyond them. The affect is more than light, more than colour, but even half a sun is enough to change the biting cold of the dawn breeze to something milder, and as the whole of the sun's disc flings over the horizon the temperature rises apace. And here is another phenomenon: the river of cold mist seems to halt in its progress sunward; the great piles and towers sink down; then, for a few minutes, this summit is overwhelmed in a white smother. The night mists came in level from the sea, they are now lifting off the hills. In half an hour the glens and ridges, the buttresses and the distant lochs appear and disappear in a whirling, a turning, of the thinning veil. Clearer, brighter, the scenes below, though this top is still in the shadow of the clouds. Up here I wait for a few minutes the coming of a second sunrise; below it is early day.

Early day! The song of the skylark, the restless chacking of the wheatear, the evil voices of carrion crow and raven, the hoarse cry of grouse, the wailing whistle of the curlew as he warns the winged creatures of the uplands that the fox is prowling perilously near. The curlew is the wakeful sentinel of bog and mountain: many a promising stalk of deer or wildfowl is marred by its clamour. (You remember the wild swans on the half-frozen lochan and the wet, muddy crawl that came to an end when the long-beaked bird "spied strangers" and sounded the alarm.) But more striking than the medley of sound is the scent of a new day. For an hour after the sun peeps over the eastern wall there is a tang, a freshness, a freedom and exhilaration on the air, which is indescribably charming. So charming that a man once breathing it is sure to wish again to be afoot in the early light. The scent of the day new-born may even possess his life, and be his solace in dreary hours when 'midst smoke and grime and noise, he may only dream of the ancient hills.

The new day calls for energy, for new conquests, in a way which demands response. So on I go, striding over bog and rock and grass, up and down, down and up, until the increasing heat distils away the scent, the charm, and I am left serenely tired, sweetly willing for rest. During the first hours of the day, most is seen of the creatures of the mountains: the red deer are less wild, and may be watched from easy distance nibbling the short grass of the corrie, or playing clumsy games of war with each other. The foxes trot leisurely home from their depredations in the glen. They may espy the wanderer but, paw in air, they sniff our innocence, and quietly jog away along the stony brae. The early sun seems to attract every reptile in wood and peak alike. I have seen a lizard basking on a warm slab at quite an elevation: no doubt flies and beetles are plentiful enough (as indeed is proved when the midges scent and come after human blood). Rabbits frisk about undeterred by the sound of approaching feet, and those pirates, the stoat and the weasel, quite unconcernedly go about exterminating the mice which exist almost to the tops of our bens. The pine marten may also be seen picking a way across the wilderness of broken fragments. A desperate character this, and yet a sportsman for he will give a scratch pack an hour of steady hunting. He is speedy, but the vigour of his leaps tires him soon, and a steady hound will follow him to his haunt, where often times he is smoked out with old newspapers, or tobacco. So far I have not met the hedgehog far up the mountains, but why should he be absent where his favourite black snails are so numerous? Some day he will come lobbing in the early light along some high shelf of the mountains.

But as the hours pass on, the strange tameness and comradeship of wild creatures departs as departed the scent of early day. And my progress down the corrie is marked by scurrying, winging, screaming, scared natives of the wilderness.

CHAPTER V

IN SNOW TIME—AS THE SNOW MELTS

GLADLY would I have headed this chapter "Nature Above Snow line" in happy memory of many hours spent on the moors and mountains in winter, but unfortunately a regular snow-line does not exist in the British Isles. Even in February a few hours of heavy thaw will reduce the expanse of white on our topmost ben or fell to little more than a congeries of streaks in the deep gullies facing north and north-east. In winter little of animated nature is seen on the highest ground, but this is extremely interesting.

There are some birds which permanently live on the uplands, mostly carrion feeders, to whom the changes of the season makes small difference. The golden eagle will rise slowly, heavily, like a great gorged vulture from the snow-sprinkled carcase of the deer which the ghillie failed to reach—a bird mighty of wings, powerful of beak and talons, king of the wilderness air, but in winter time not exactly fitted for the heroic rôle. When the eaglets are hissing and screaming and bickering for food on the ledge of the eyrie, anything smaller and less resolute than a full-grown man is in danger of assault. Against the white battlements of the hill his great mass stands out sharply as he soars in ever widening circles up to the blue vault of the heavens, and then, a mere dot, sails beyond the ken of the eye.

I admit slight prejudice against the golden eagle. My first impression of him in the real wilds is linked in memory to a most vile odour. Rather would I linger in thought upon the wild swan as a prince of the mountain air, though in snow-time he merely follows the white-tipped ridges as guides in his southerly flight. A loch where strong springs bubbling up show a small area free of ice, an unfrozen marsh, a clear reach of the river, attract him to a night's rest. Yet I know a gap in the bens which might be a home for the swans so regularly during winter are the "V's" or the undulating line of single bird viewed. From a distance the progress of the swan looks graceful, and our poets have admired it in resounding lines and cantos, but close at hand the grace is less evident. The tiny wings work at a tremendous speed, and the neck rigidly outstretched gives a ridiculous look to the passing bird.

Close at hand the swan lacks the excellent flight of eagle or heron. The common heron is lanky of neck, and has long stick-like legs, but in the air it achieves a marvel of proportion and balance, and its adequate sweep of wing sends it along in effortless style. Yet by one of Nature's ironies, the labouring, scurrying swan is called upon to make long stages on its migrations while the heron's power and grace never carries it a score flight-miles away from its roost and feeding places. The golden eagle in adult life has even a less range than that. A line of wild swans dropping down

through the limpid gold of a winter sunset, down past the lacework of white summits fading away to a pearly blue, down, down to a patch of open water, is indeed a wonderful sight. Then the ripples on the loch caused by the settling birds makes flashes, almost rainbows, for here, they glint back the golden glory of the west, there the placid silver or the rosy flush of the hills, and there again the blue, the green of open water. High behind the mountain barrier, the gold and the rose dies away, the ripples rock themselves to sleep, in blue comes the gloom of eventide, the stars, and then the partial darkness, the repose of a snow-covered world. After their 300 miles of flight over a storm-tossed sea the wild swans are at rest, at rest.

As the wild swan is rather a fugitive among our frozen hills, a haunter of the air rather than of the land, leaving within a few hours the gloomy loch and the storm-darkened springs, the wild goose is another winter visitor, a far more numerous family and of restricted powers. Now and again a bevy of geese will frequent the same bays and springs for weeks together, only departing to the shore or winging further south when the last lane of open water freezes. The wild goose is more garrulous, less dignified than the swan, but still it is a bird of beauty. Its flight on rising from water or field or when descending from the air is without majesty, emphasizing all the scuttering and flurry of the swan.

This causerie on flight and majesty has rather drawn me from my subject. There is a whole family of carrion-eaters and depredators yet to consider. On the bens facing out and over the sea, there is the strident call of the white-tailed eagle, less in size and power than our golden emperor, but still useful. From its habit of frequenting the shores for live and carrion fish it has the name of the sea eagle, and indeed there are few eyries beyond sight and sound of the wintry waves. A shelf on the cliff up which the salt spray soaks in clouds is preferable to any ledge offered by an inland ben. The young of both our eagles are sad roamers, ranging hundreds of miles south of their homes, and the golden-brown plumage of the immature sea-eagle (which only in the adult stage attains the rows of white feathers in the tail) often causes it to be mistaken for the more kingly bird. The osprey, our third and minor eagle, has little love for the snow-covered bens, and incontinently makes flight to the open sea after summer. Its food is sweeter in choice, for the osprey habitually "stoops" to trout and young salmon in fresh waters, and other fishes in the sea, striking them as they swim or feed near the surface.

A day among mountain snows would not be complete without the croaking of ravens, the highest rank in the *Corvidæ* or crow family. In eagle country there is legend that the raven has to act as jackal or underling, marking down the meat unerringly and then waiting with patience until the master-bird has gorged before taking a full meal from the residue. But where the raven is supreme he is much less timid: he soars to "the place in the sun" and covers a great stretch of country in the everyday patrol. Next to the raven comes his understudies, the northern corbies or

grey crows and the carrion crows, pestilential brutes both, devouring whenever possible the eggs and young of small birds, a practice which the major birds of the snow-covered bens only indulge when starvation stares them in the face.

The buzzard is a small eagle in size and build, a finer flier than the raven, soaring up easily whether the breeze be soft or a winter hurricane screaming over the mountains. He is a grand bird, with fine ash-lined wings, but mighty cowardly, eating even beetles and minor organisms. Hard put to it in winter, he often leaves the snowy uplands altogether picking up carrion in glen and along shore. The peregrine, chief of our falcons, is different—a bird of the mightiest courage. He is swift of flight, keen of sight, and high of spirit. He does not leave the frozen uplands so long as there is a single game bird to be preyed upon. The snow bunting is as choice to him as is the ptarmigan which tones out its uniform of grey to suit even the whiteness of its surroundings; nor do mice and voles come amiss if seen among the rocks and drifts. It is not unusual for the colonies of these latter rodents to establish themselves at good heights on the bens, and judging by their tracks and tunnels they soon become acclimatized and romp in and out of the snow drifts. On their frolics by day stoops down the fierce peregrine, and rarely without a capture.

The ptarmigan is most typical of our birds which change plumage with the seasons. In summer the feathers are grey and even brown, but in snow-time they are so blanched that the bird is nearly invisible against the drifts. This is Nature's wise precaution to preserve a species which must feed on the grass seeds and heather tops far from any safe cover. The ptarmigan is only found on the highest bens and attempts to introduce it south of the Clyde have failed. The ptarmigan and the red grouse frequent practically the same sort of ground, but the former has more endurance. On high snow is heard the evening call, and keen eyes see it shifting quarters to avoid the human taint. There are two winter migrants which cling to the upper mountain until long-continued snow compels their retreat—the redwing and the fieldfare. The former is a smaller thrush showing a red stain as in flight its underwing is visible; the latter, a greater bird, has a good deal of ashen grey relieving the light brown of its feathering. Both come across from Scandinavia in great flocks and begin their winter sojourn of the quietest places. At first they live entirely on fruit, and the early snows surprise them before they have stripped the rowans which straggle up the rugged gorges and corries. After the rowans they attack the hollies and then the yews. The berries of the latter, poisonous to animals and dangerous to humans, are apparently a relish to the birds. With them, too, comes the crossbill, but this prefers to be a dweller in the woodlands and rarely ventures far from the warm cover of pines or spruces. Sometimes a tribe of these bright little birds are so enamoured of their quarters that they do not answer the call of the North when summer comes again, and settle down, make nests and hatch their young.

Most large four-footed creatures retire from the bens and high moors

when the first veil of snow falls. The deer, the fox, the brown hare all retire to lower ground, together with that elusive creature, the wild cat. The badger is rarely on mountain ground, and in winter is lying snugly asleep in his earth among the brambles far down the glen; the otter's upper wanderings are confined to those warm nights of summer when crayfish are at their best, in the pools, and anyway he is out for a pleasure trip to another series of streams and lochs. The white or blue mountain hare remains on the snowfields, particularly where the covering is thin and food is within scraping distance. This creature changes its coat to suit the new surroundings.

And preying on the mice and voles which still linger in some warm nooks is a colony of weasels, many of them almost snow-white. In the same places, larger than the weasel, is the stoat or pole-cat, and the foulmart or stone marten, creatures which are not loth to lie out near the mouse supply. The sweet marten is much more tender, needing the warmth of the wood and the neighbourhood of game or poultry roosts. The foulmart will mark one particular hare and hunt it for half a day before it is able to close in and kill, and the stoat is equally skilled and patient as a hunter. So far as human observation is concerned, they are shy, and the sounds of crunching snow sends them to cover. But I have been fortunate enough to watch such a creature basking on a rock in the genial hour of a fine mid-winter day.

Other vagrant birds are occasionally seen on the snow-covered bens and moors include: great fierce owls harried here by wild storm from Greenland or Central Europe, giant falcons and goshawks from the fjelds and fjords of Norway, rare swans and geese wandering far from their native tundras; now and again, waif from the ocean, a storm-battered gull or petrel or puffin. But these are rare, and make incidents to be marked in one's diary of life.

AS THE SNOW MELTS

In the stark Northland, April is but the far edge of winter, a time of tremulous snowdrops and green dogs' mercury, with the golden daffodils following to gild the shore of the loch and to welcome the progress of spring. On the hills the nights and most of the days are of winter—mid-winter—frost and snow and raging gales. In the Grampians and the Northern Highlands "alpine" conditions are not far to seek—great gullies festooned with ice and blocked with snow, buttresses where the cream-blue verglas makes delicate lace-work, and in the Cairngorms to the eastward whole upper-glens are apt to remain for days unreachable. The Cairngorms get few of the melting Atlantic breezes which so quickly strip the snow wreaths from Lochaber and the misty Isle of Skye, and the mighty fields of dingy-white hold their own until far into summer. One great drift on Ben Nevis is rarely thawed even in the hottest September; on Braeriach of the Cairngorms is a permanent snowdrift.

The story of the snow is for ever a romance, from the moment the

first tiny flakes sidle down from the leaden sky to the frost-clutched fields, to the hour when the last edge crumbles between the rocks and melts into the brown spate of thaw-time. It is of thaw-time that I would write, of the days of contention between winter and spring, and the final victory of the latter. The Northland winter is a serious factor in the year, and not for one day are we allowed to forget it.

The song of the dipper or water ousel as it hopped and flirted from boulder to sand-spit and rummaged among the pebbles in the pools was a reminder this morning that spring is at hand. The snow-line has gradually crept up the heather, and several grass knolls are dull-green to the summit. Then comes the rain—which is snow on the bens overhead—the wind which slants the grey lines of water just like the down strokes in old-time penmanship, a booming wind here which is a gale howling and screeching among the upper rocks. I can hear it, swinging round into the corrie through the teeth of the Seven Sisters, and crashing into great gusts there. Then suddenly the light goes; there is no pretence at a sunset; the loch disappears, the road, the pines, and within doors the lamps are lighted. But even so, the storm makes itself heard indoors for the great blasts fumble against doors and windows. Then comes more slashing of rain, the rattle of occasional hailstones, and then suddenly at midnight—Peace.

The great piles of clouds racing across the northern sky proclaim that this is but a truce, the truce of maybe an hour, but how clear the night sky, how still the air, how little distant the stars. The last flurry of storm has left the glen white with hail, which weirdly contrasts with the dead-black of the pines, the level plain of the loch. Standing outdoors a few minutes later, the sounds are not of peace. Beyond the ferry and the point the Sound is speaking to the rocky shore—there is a steady beating of heavy surf. Yes, and there is also a change in the note of the cascade across the fields at the foot of the garden. Yesterday the moorland springs were frozen, and the waterfall made a tinkling whisper. But a dozen hours of rain and thaw gathers a roaring torrent from the heights, and from the rock-throat beneath the pines there is now liquid thunder. Then a push, a whistle, a billow of rain—the thaw-storm is again at work, and I retire indoors.

There is only one possible walk for the clear morning after a heavy thaw-storm: by the ferry and then up the road which follows the loch to its head, thence up the hill-path by several tiny lochans, and down the long slant of the ancient causeway home. "Can we cross?" is our greeting to the "loon" (alias youth) at the ferry, but he is not confident, and engages the ancient with plaid and snuff-box to say that the tide must set a wee first. Certainly there is something daunting in the brown waters churning and spouting and hurrying through the narrow rock-rimmed channel. But an hour sees the sea-water, line upon line of green topped with white, shouldering back the other current; there is a vast tumult, water charges water and spray is thrown up at every contact. Behind

this warring front the tide moves inwards in comparative calm, and on this we embark. At times this passage has a foaming cataract, when the lift of a south-westerly gale is behind the hurrying tide. Little concerned in this riot of waters are the shags and divers and diving ducks which, undeterred by Tom's ancient gun with its bark and whirl of shot, twice a day follow the salt water's advance. A good gun and a good shot might do some execution, but the birds are wary and pass through the danger zone by long dives. A mere flash above water and they are gone, to rise again scores of yards away. On quiet days it is not unusual to see a cormorant or a scoter, quick and lithe as the fishes in their own element, pass right under the ferry-boat.

A few steps up the slippery weed-hung boulders brings us to the road. Backward the view is splendid. The whole Sound is lifting to the thaw-breeze, tossing white feathers here and there, and the blue islets floating beyond, their peaks slashed and patched with white. And along the shore comes on majestic wings a great heron, fit king for this waste of waters though itself a land-bird. The heron is the tallest of our remaining British birds, a very giant though lanky in build among pigmies. In former days the gentry of the Scottish courts took it by means of fierce hawks, but nowadays a game bag containing a heron would arouse amused comment. As food the bird is not to be despised, provided the preparation be on commonsense lines. But the labourer today will refuse as food a bird which was wont to grace the King's table in Scotland long ago. Another attractive bird is the dunlin, groups of which still remain on the loch, though flocks sped to the south last autumn. A small bird of the stilted, sandpiper type, its white-lined wings betray its presence the moment it essays flight; though running or at halt on the open shore it is far from conspicuous. A flight of a thousand dunlin skimming, as is their wont, close to the waves, on gloomy days seems to flash light every time direction is changed, the dun back being relieved by the white of breast and underparts of the winging birds. The call of the curlew is undeniable anywhere near the tide-way today; most careful and alarmist of scouts is this bird of the sickle-beak, long legs and white-striped back. Sometimes its warnings are scarcely taken in good part: I have seen a lesser black-backed gull, against whose face the unwelcome presence of a man was shrieked, turn on and soundly pummel the would-be informer.

As the pine woods of the point are cleared, the outlook changes. To the left is a huge cliff, brown with larches and with alders, where streams are gushing and roaring, and high in front is a great mass of mountain, white-capped and with great streaks showing where on the buttresses and in the corries the snow has whirled into deep drifts. The loch itself looks comparatively peaceful, for the tide has spent its force and only a grey spit here and there shows the presence of salt water. There is a rustle in the forest above: a party of red deer putting space between themselves and disturbing man. How quickly these wild creatures can get away: a hillside bristling with rocks and trees is no barrier or halt to their speed. A

Lone Shieling and Crofter

Photo by Douglas Bolton





mountain fox creeps away and is lost to view against the tangle of dead fern.

Of course we do not see the famous wild cat; the yowling of this has been a terror o' nights to generation after generation, and the cottars tell with bated breath of green eyes flashing, on the darkest of nights, from the thickets above the bridges—they tell of stealthy footsteps, of attempted attacks, of dogs turned mad with fright. But old Duncan of the ferry holds that our wild cat sleeps through the winter, "and a cosy-like wee nest it has, deep down in the broken rocks." In hot youth Duncan swore a feud, on reasons sufficient but unstated, against the cat which however grew so akin to a wolf that the sturdy Scot declined to pass this side of the loch, and thought it was "no canny" and "forbye" oaths were ridiculous and wicked.

Both types of hare frequent this district, the brown one sticking to the low country (in which it favours the coy roe deer) and the blue, which in snow-times comes startlingly near to white, lives up the bens and braes. It would seem that many creatures are out today in the brief warmth of noon, rejoicing, celebrating the breakdown of winter's siege on their food supplies. At this thaw-time corpses of deer, hare, fox, rabbit, and, yes, even of wild cat are discovered. Poor creatures which have failed to hold out until the better day. There is a still more pitiful sight—that of a deer which, still alive, has become so reduced by illness and exposure that it is fading out of life just as the new vigour is leaping into tree and plant, and when the rest of the herd is delighting in fresh strength. Alone, deserted, the poor creature drags itself away, and the wicked hoodies and carrion crows, the ravens and eagles, mount guard over a prospective banquet.

By the time the head of loch is passed, the day is almost over; the sun has long been extinguished in a bank of silver vapour out over the ocean. So it is that we hurry along up the long path, pass the lochans, and come to the foot of the pass, on and on, and then hush!—in the cold evening light the wild swans are coming, coming fast. The song of the Northern thaw has sounded into their faraway winter haunts, and they are yearning for their true homes—maybe in the deep fjords of Norway, or on a tundra within the Arctic Circle, or in the bogs of distant Iceland or Spitzbergen. Our swans are not concerned tonight with a flight across the North Sea; down, down they slope, and we hear the call to rest, to rest on one of the lochans, a pool of dead silver among the bog. And the grey gloom of early night hides them from our sight.

CHAPTER VI

MOUNTAIN COLOUR: IN SUMMER AND IN WINTER

IN Britain there is the finest of mountain scenery. Our heights do not soar; everything is true to scale and comprehensible to eye and brain. In the brief arctic summer the peaks of Norway are dykes of rock and walls of snow bursting through a mantle of green so vivid that "it shouts at you". The rest of the year such mountains are a weariness of dull-white, ice-shackled grey and black. There is now no contrast just as earlier there was too much. Summer and winter alike, the eye finds perfect colour harmonies, rich gradations of tone, among the peaks of Britain.

Is there anything unexpected that in these days our crags and hillsides are in very truth coming to great honour, into a love which is entirely their own. By some of us these beauties have been worshipped for years, but new people see with new eyes; they have fresh perceptions of form and colour, and they speak from the soul: "Alps or no Alps," says such a person to me, "this is worth while." *This* was an afternoon of still, purple gloom, in which our stony ridge alone stood distinct. Of neighbouring heights, there were vast, dim presences; there was a dim pool of glen, a flickering outline of loch, a chaotic medley of foothills, a light band of distant sea. Yes, it was worthwhile indeed.

A scarlet banner was suddenly unfurled in the north. It was ragged, indecisive in its shape, yet it remained firm and steady in its colour. It was the King's colour of a mystic battalion. It was warning of long marches, grim tactics, hard struggles. We knew it for a burst of sunset through a gap in the hills, yet it held a message, and we thrilled as it narrowed to a flaring sword-blade, then disappeared in the pall of eventide. At such times there may be a fiery cross, an iridescent shroud in the sky, and no wonder such signs are accepted by many as portents of events to come.

There are mountains in Britain where the sunshine dashes sapphire glories from the wet, blue slabs. There are mountains crowned with the ivory of felspar, the white counsellors of Wester Ross. There are mountains where the crag is purple, dashing imperial purple in sunlight, stern purple of judgment when the storm clouds whirl and lower. In my high-level camps I have wakened to the vision of a slender purple spire illumined with dawn while the world beneath was clad in grey of night mist. There are mountains of light red sandstone and of grim basalt and millstone grit—places where Nature can smile and places where she always frowns. I know, too, a range which from far away stands like a wall of dim and regular peaks, pale gold against the horizon—they are—and I have no desire to go nearer. Let them remain the battlements of Heaven

as my childhood faith believed them to be; some illusions are too sweet to dissipate.

From crest to foot our British mountains are full of colour. They have not the sterile garishness of the Dolomites, but there is wonderful range. Take Cruachan, monarch of the West, as you look back in farewell from Loch Awe. Bronze and green are the coppice woods; flecked with bars of white the broken cliffs. Here a stream gushes, there one hides. There again is a grove of "white ladies", silver birches. The gold and red of dying bracken lights up every glade. The fern dies in softer tones than this. The upper rocks are rich with mosses, emerald, grey, white, brown, with here and there a touch of rose-stained sphagnum or purple lichen. In the great expanse the green holly glistens, the rowan has coral berries, and yew and fir make sombre masses.

On the higher ground there is colour of earth, though the shadow and smile of sky is more pronounced. The corrie leans back against the upper crags, tufted with cotton grass, splashed with blood-red of bilberry, with yellow-green of parsley fern, dark brown of heather. Darker still are the peat-hags, in which here and there at night the fire-fungus is disturbed by wandering feet, a veritable Will-o'-the-wisp skimming where marsh gas never was. So we come to the upper rocks, great walls of shadow or light, where a tiny world decked with deer grass may be hidden in a slit and only discovered by the chance Rambler. Of course, the deer have known it from all time.

Then look down from our mountains: there is Schiehallion, where there is vision three-fourths across Scotland, over rich carse where the fields are golden, over woods where oaks give out a sturdy fire, over moors where heather stretches fold after fold of a dark-toned but delicious garment. The distant hills are patched with cloud shadows, mists kiss and toss round their crests. There is a sterility here and there—naked rocks and stretches of broken stones, and fine green pastures leading down to the sea. Then there are lochs—great, silent tongues winding among larches spruces and pines, and lochans varying from the tiny pool on the rocky shoulder, which reflects every tinge of sky and air, to the green and sapphire shield beneath the crag, which changes little either with season, light or storm. Here and there a tarn is so deeply set that its face reflects only gloom. But what gloom! Others less deeply-set give steel-blue of a windy day, purple of sunset portending rain, harsh blue of winter with sunshine glancing on icy cliffs, and homely blue when the air is warm and the dawn has just passed from the land.

My memories revel in colour of the mountains. Even the Coolin have jewels to show, though maybe their blackness is more relieved by sunshine after rain, when the great rock slabs sparkle with drops and rainbows hide in every gully, when the corries are filled with soft, sun-kissed vapour, and the peaks tower through filmy draperies of white. When a real storm is impending, these giants stand grim and threatening, but now they seem amiable, smiling, even at play. But the Coolin has no soft velvet of pines

where the sunshine peeps and glances, where cool shadows of summer, warm glooms of winter always lurk.

There are splashes of red, of cobalt, of dull crimson, among the crags, glorious tags of colour none the less interesting because we know what metal ore has outcropped. Time was when from these outer wilds came iron, steel, lead and copper—let us forgive the adventurers of old for the slag-heaps, the rubbish-tips, the awful scars which they inflicted on the mountain side, when the heart of a mountain was transmuted into sordid but necessary gold.

So long as the peaks are visible along the horizon, we are bound by the spell of their variation, in vagaries of their colour. Sometimes they look grim, as seen from the Castle Walk at Stirling; at others they are a mere edging, the fence behind a glorious outlook. The grey hills of the Border have their season of beauty, but it is not in high drought. Then the grass parches to a slippery, tawny mat which the hardiest cattle and sheep will not crop. Nor it is after rain when the slopes are sodden, and the bogs over full. The streams flow too gently to excite themselves into the vigorous white and brown ply of the Highland torrent. In floodtime they seem depressed, not joyous, weak not strong. The Border hills are in their glory when the year is at the spring, when the tender green of young blades is reviving the sober hue of the hills, when the wee flowers are shining in gold and white, and when the air is full of the colour of the skylark's song. The ear and the eye are in unison in appreciating the glory of such a heyday among the hills.

Storm, mist, gale, snow, all influence the colouring of the hills just as of the high bens, but the stark, bold, uppermost features are missed. The long rolls of sheep-walk carry the eye to the dim blue of distance, but there are no vast walls, no deep cups, none of the majesty of the deer forest.

There is colour of romance among these: the Wizard of the Border (Sir Walter Scott) wove tales plaintive and war-like round the smooth features of his home and haunts, but to the bens of the North he turned for his wildest incidents, for his most thrilling adventures. Strong men and warlike are those of the mountains, gaining their livelihood in close fight with a Nature sterile at heart, and bent on destruction. The hills of the Southland never looked on such a struggle for existence as that which has lasted until today in the Highlands where the sea is more liberal in rewards than the land.

Spare a word for the colour of the mountain creatures! They are just part and parcel of the whole. The fox may wear the uniform of russet and white and black practically unaltered. The stag may change colour as the mud of summer bogs tints his coat, or he may be paler after the snows of winter. They are the monarchs of the bens. Nothing but a few half-tamed dogs live by the death of the Highland fox, but a very world of keepers, watchers and ghillies live to protect the stag and his harem from harm. They have become his servants, providing his table, even choosing his

bed away from the haunts of men. The eagle, too, is a monarch, and his independence is sure.

Perhaps in the last autumn months mountain colour is least visible, but that is a matter of climate. For days together the mists close down stubbornly. Day is a mere lightening of the gloom in the corries, and not a revelation at all. Nor is the mist of the feathery, sun-kissed order beloved in July. It is dead wet vapour, banked apparently from the limits of our atmosphere, choking light and sound, and movement. Climbing becomes mere exercise, unless the way of the rocks is known, and even there the holds come greasy to the hands, and the colour of the slabs and gullies is one blank of unrelieved grey. But a touch of Nature's magic, a roaring and a sougling of wind, a sharp scurry of rain, and the corrie is ablaze with the richest gleams of autumn. The buttresses of the ben are garbed in radiance; there is a fringe round the pools; the bog is sparkling with rain diamonds, with the silver of wet sphagnum and the crags rejoice in a tearful, passing vision of glory. There is dark purple of distant hills and the blue smoke of hidden corries, and the distant sea-loch shines like gold. This is autumn colour among British hills.

WINTER

At sunset the snow-capped ridges of the Cairngorms above the deep troughs of the Lairig Ghru were suffused with rose, reminiscent of Alpine evenings. The clear, still air was flooded with light, tender of shade, evanescent of tone, mighty in its expression of Italian heights, of Vosges contours, and I was happy enough. It is a grievous error to suppose that "darkness and clouds cover the face" of this wild and lonely tract of Britain. This day of late winter—spring comes to the Cairngorms with the songbirds and the flowers—has been full of colour, and memory gives other scenes almost voluptuous in their richness, harmony and contrast of light, pigment and shade. Even the cold sparkle of starlight binds the senses with mystery. From the pine woods I have looked upward to the soaring heights clothed with dull silver and ivory, with glints and cat's-eyes of purple and blue, with the dark-wine sky above, and a ruffle of silver-grey mists below, with stillness and splendour, with the soft breeze whispering, in strange, tongueless jargon, the secrets of the past, which was, and is, and shall be, ever-present and yet unknown. The majesty of Nature at night is felt with the great pines behind, and the eternal mountains in front and above.

There is more of brilliance, and less of the hidden reality, in moonlight over the snow-clad heights. The vault of heaven, which anon bent its stars towards the yearning soul of earth, is now drawn aloof. A big, rollicking moon flings across the middle distance, and weaves a cold glittering mist between humanity and the speechful stars. In the city, along the level glens, the moon may have its glory, but upon the heights it is a veritable Puck, lighting corpse-candles on the buttresses, throwing wanton shadows along the rolling snowfields, burying slopes and corries

in starkest gloom, distorting, twisting, changing every feature of the hills until the wanderer is puzzled and believes the familiar, the fast-anchored land, is changed. It is evil trickery indeed for the moon-rise to add to the problem of flying snowdust on the mountain track, and after many a struggle through such a confusion, one may be pardoned for not ranking high moonlight's winter glamour on the heights.

There is fine colour on and about the snow-clad hills at dawn. I remember well the great corridor of ice and snow and rock up which we travelled to a great peak of Glencoe. As at noon we had to leave the mountains, our start was before dawn and over frozen moor and scree. Through the thin grey mist the dark rock-cliff peeped coyly: above the white ridges seemed to loom and disappear. Then to work—there was enough of light to pick out the soundest strip of snow, and the sharp slash of the ice-axe broke the silence. Now and again there was a tinkle as an ice-plate shivered to fragments or as an icicle was knocked adrift. Up into the narrow throat of the gully, the way ever icier, ever steeper; then a dexterous scramble, mostly between a rock-slab and the cliff from which it was rending, and out on to the great upper slope. The night mist has now fallen past us, and we looked to the east where the dark-blue was cut by a level bar of gold, and great swinging shafts of light were shooting upward, catching a feather of cloud here, a sop there, and turning it into pink or red. Here was the morning's winter glory indeed. Soon the light bent lower, its arms broadened, melted together, and were lost in a steady flush of red, and then the great snow-crest overhead was touched into radiance, and gave signal to the day. A great rim of blood-crimson wheeled into the cloud-bar on the horizon, burned into gold, then flashed clear, and round us was the full colour of a perfect winter day. We saw the lower world of crags and moors, of glens and lochans, tilt upward to the great face of day, and, last of all, through the windows of the western mist, came distant moors, and the dark isles and reefs of the purple-blue Atlantic. Such a magnificent sight may not be everybody's fortune, even among men and women who climb and wander much in wildest Britain.

At mid-day there is wealth of winter-colour even in these misty wilds. I have stood on a broad shelf of Ben Nevis's glorious but grim northern face, and been entranced. Down in the Great Glen which cuts across the Highlands from the Atlantic to Moray Firth were great shields of silver-blue lochs set in bronze of heather, in green and crimson of pine forests, in straw-gold of low-lying pastures. The air between seemed lit with glory, pouring round each feature of the broad view, and turning to shimmering the wayward tide-rips of Loch Eil. And above this lower glory was a bar of white, sheets of ivory, gleams of silver, points of light—the great hills near and far, a tumultuous array of summits. But the chief beauty of the hour was above our heads. To right and left great purple towers, streaked, seamed and patched with snow, flung up to a cold green sky, but between were ravishing views of the upper white, which, now

the sun was broad on the far side of the Ben, slept in tranquil purity. Above the snow-slope was a zone of ethereal blue, bright, cheery—the cornices. During winter gales the big snows on the peak had blown outward and curved over the sharp ledges, leaving a recess in which shadows would have lurked, were it not that the soft snow-wreaths allow light to filter through, and to mingle into a soft sparkle of the utmost glory.

When gloom and glamour are fighting for mastery of the sides of Schiehallion, there are many wondrous colour effects. One moment you may be in a world of blue snow and grey cloud—a whirl of silver and white, and then almost blinded by the glare of sunlight on leagues of snowfields. To ease the eyes I look away to the far-away glens, where the feeble green is shooting over the fields, and maybe a few cattle are taking an airing from their winter prison sheds, or a shepherd is wandering round the ewe flock, concerned as to its condition in face of storms yet to come. These days on the heights are rather dreaded than sought, but there is delight in skirting the edge of cloudland and revelling in the sunbursts, the glooms, and the glories from near at hand. Sometimes in descending a ridge a zone is entered where rainbow hues seem to lurk and play, but shortly comes the steady “silver mist”, and then through the skirts of cloud to full open day. How richly blessed is the most ordinary glen of all Scotland to eyes tired of hours in the clouds, where sky and ridge, and the whole world seem to be inextricable chaos—chaos in which the soft, plodding footing is the thing most certain.

He who has once seen “the green flash” at sunset never forgets. The spell of the wild shore, the marshy corrie, the scree-fan, and the soaring rock-peak is on him or her for ever. But to see the green light stream from the western horizon, turning ivory to emerald, rose to blue, the patch of shadow to a bath of infinite tender radiance is to be conquered to the depth of one’s soul. The sun went down beyond lonely St. Kilda, the rose glow kindled, then faded, and in a moment the world was swimming in green fire, corrie, jagged crag, sea-loch, and the wee tarn at our feet. The effect was bewildering, but shortly it passed away, and in silence we tramped down the last long slope to the glen, while the sky changes its steady course of transmutations from rose to grey, and thence to purple-blue of night.

Such is the winter colour of our heights and wildernesses, rare, soul-filling, happy memories of arduous days, of peaceful nights, of fellowships which will pass to the very gates of Heaven itself.

CHAPTER VII

BRITISH HILL WEATHER

"More Happy than Accurate"—Feel of the Rocks—Autumn Vision.

THE enthusiastic ridge walker makes little provision for the weather in his or her programmes. It is the unexpected that he or she expects, and a tour in which the weather remained uniformly fine would lose all its charm and be forgotten. When the 2000 foot contour is passed a different set of weather conditions may rule, and this second set is wonderful in variety. There is absolutely no saying beforehand what will occur, and the whole gamut may be run within an hour. In late June I spent an uncomfortable half-hour on a Ross-shire peak, almost overwhelmed in a blizzard of peculiar venom and density. The air was so close-packed with flying particles that vision ahead was impossible, and even to breathe not easy. Yet this infliction was very local. After ten minutes of clear sky and warm air only a faint band of melting white half a mile wide remained. On the far side of the ben whither we were bound not even the storm-cloud had been noticed, and my account was received with palpable reserve. And a few days later it happened that I climbed upward from one of the western sea-lochs where a cool breeze was ruffling the surface, up, up, to the stillness stillest of atmospheres on the ridges and summit of my particular ben. More usually, however, the reverse holds good, and the choking glen or strath is escaped for the free rushing breezes above.

The enthusiast thinks more particularly of weather of the sort experienced lately on Ben Wyvis and the great hills about Loch Maree and the sea-lochs of the Ross-shire coast. No sooner had Perth been left than the clouds seemed to swoop specially to give us a damp, very damp welcome. Ben Vrackie, Ben-y-Gloe, to the right, Schiehallion to the left, with huge masses of hills betwixt and between, were playing hide and seek in pearly curtains. Further on, more clouds swept over the giants which look down on the infant Garry, breaking on the rival heights of Atholl and Badenoch, and even foaming in white puffs along the treeless wastes which wall in the pass of Drumochter.

Inside a railway train the storm matters little, but I have felt the storm roaring through the hollow pass, and seen the cloud hurled like artillery smoke level across the glen to crumple against the silent, rain-washed bens beyond. The weather improves a little as we draw away from the ramparts of mountains and rattle down by the Spey. At Inverness the early sun shines strong, but a white band on the horizon speaks of mountains hidden, now and again a faint black speck to the north may be the shoulder of Ben Wyvis conquering the whirling foe.

Most of our gorgeous experiences of hill weather have come on days of light and shade in the valleys, when fierce sunshine alternated with cool violet glooms, when the clouds never desisted from their sweeping through the rock-towers and across the grass and heather slopes. I am still fresh from such a day in the Northern Highlands. Our cautious weather-prophet declared before breakfast that "there would no be rain the day". At least, down in the glen and on the loch. His wisdom ignored conditions 2000 feet overhead—but we decided, as usual, to risk it. It is always (nearly) possible to retreat from a wicked rain-storm, but never to make up the ground and time lost by waiting for a belated improvement in the weather. If it is not raining, make a start; if it is raining slightly, start but do not carry a heavy mackintosh. The rubber suits which would defy the mountain mists would have to be skin tight—and therefore unbearable. There is no harm in getting clothes soaked, provided that every precaution is taken to keep moving afterwards. If it were otherwise, hill walkers would cease to exist, and the petulant query of Lord Chesterfield about hunting would become true of this more glorious sport. "Do men ever hunt twice?" he asked. Men—and women too—climb twice, and as much oftener as an opportunity serves.

But to return to our day on the hills. The deer path wound steadily upward, and then a curtain of cloud seemed to fall around us. Stalkers' tracks are often useful approaches to the ridge or on to the narrow buttress of a mountain, but beyond that they do not serve. The sportsman after his stag has requirements quite different to the hill walker. So, producing map and compass, a careful survey is made, and a course set for the top of the ben. There is this advantage about summer mists—they damp steadily through every garment, and until the halt is taken you do not know how complete is the wetting. Today the track is easy; a long rib of mountain, steep and narrow and unmistakable, like a ladder set up against the great bulk. An hour and more we stroll along, avoiding haste, avoiding halt, varying the pace to the soft grass patches, the crumbling scree, and the broken rocks. So we approach the windward edge of our ben, where the cloud-stream jets more rapidly along, and our gaining altitude is marked by the thinning of the hill shadow above. Then suddenly the cloud whirls away, a great grey cliff, a mighty tower of rock, shoots into sight. A moment, and it is gone. But the glance was enough to prove that our blinded course was correct, and soon the line of cairns along the edge is struck. Now we hope against hope that the veil of cloud will again be rent, for that would give us a glorious view either seaward, or up the deep cleft glen. But the mountain is coy, maidenly, and the cloud about her thickens, darkens, and there is a sharp pelt of rain. Again the compass bearing, and off we go facing outward towards the Minch. And down, down, plunges our course, turning right or left to avoid a pile of broken rock, to swerve past some deep gully. Then again the burst of light, weak sunshine around us, and down through a rock portal we look at the blue sea, with here an island and there a

skerry, with green of shallow and purple of cloud glooms, and a silver thread drawing in and out among the waves.

Another day, we were still more favoured. A very tempest delayed the start, then in the cool, clear light following storm we rushed up towards the hills. Imagine starting out after tea to climb a three-thousand footer! But summer days in Scotland are vastly accommodating in their length, and at ten o'clock it was not yet dark. As we climbed the steep wall of the corrie a pall of mist swept along, but did not delay us. Just as the cairn was reached, the mist-stream passed along, and in two minutes we turned from the dusk of storm to a brilliant sunset. Out beyond the Hebrides the great ball sunk slowly behind the waves, but for long sky and air and sea were bathed in glory.

Hill weather frequently means torrents of rain, wild thunderstorms, the flashes of lightning, the howling of strong winds, and, of course, there is no sense in starting a walk in such turmoil. Yet after heavy rain it is a pleasure to wander up the great rock corries and to hear the roar of many torrents. On such a night we crossed a lofty pass. There had been much rain, and it was fortunate that a full moon helped us through the forced march our delay had rendered necessary. The silver gleam of water, much water, jetting, spouting, tossing water was everywhere. Again and again brooks had to be waded, and at the greatest stream the ford was invisible beneath the spate. However, with the aid of a stout alpine rope, a passage was half swum, half waded. How eerie the feeling as boots failed to bottom the stream and away one was swept until the rope got into action. Had our route been through any but a well travelled bealach it would have been impossible until daylight.

Hill weather means bogs, and much tribulation thereby. It is awful, on a misty day, to follow a track into a labyrinth of pools, to lose it, and then fail to find a way back to sound earth except by plunging and wading. But bog is the glory of many a moor and glen, but after a day of such experiences, progress other than by main road or rock slope is abjured. Not that rock slopes are always an improvement for I remember vividly the long slabs which are the only way up a ridge of the Coolin, and the tremendous cataract which hid most of the holds and almost washed us away.

"MORE HAPPY THAN ACCURATE"

On our arrival the callant with the rickety machine gave a discouraging report. Day after day, night after night, the July rain had continued to swell the feeble burns until the ford to the hills was barely passable. "The great stone was under water most of the time." Mine host had seen a huge waterfall in the main gully, leaping out over the capstone which gives the cave pitch its glory, right to the screes beneath the cliff. Another night of driving rain, with sodden clouds screening even the nearer slopes from view, mended matters none. But the temptation to climb somewhere, anywhere, was too great to be resisted.

Though the weather might be gloomy, the breakfast-time was brightened by stories of great days of sport when the clouds hung low, these gales shrieked, and the roar of snow-fed torrents shocked the glen. Worse days than this we had spent on the hills, and our recollections were happy—perhaps more happy than accurate.

“It isn’t wise-like,” objected Dugald, who was at once host and friend, and, had we admitted his wisdom, would have been counsellor as well. Nor was it. At any rate, having travelled so far with small prospects of good weather, we would go and “take a look”. One thing was certain. “There’ll be clothes to dry the night,” was overheard as the kitchen ordered an extra supply of peat and logs. So away up the soaking corrie, up the green slopes, through the zone of broken boulders, and up the screes, a 1000 feet into the mist, with raindrops as big as marbles pelting our faces.

The great gully was a weird and marvellous spectacle. Down from an unseen height flung a cataract; the walls of rock, in clear weather so sheer and forbidding, took on a new aspect; and never was soft dolomite weathered into spires so fantastic, pinnacles so crazy, towers soaring so high as these. And a mere shifting of the mist softly obliterated each marvel, so that a moment later some new combination might be shown.

Now, having arrived, we must climb. I thought of something moderate. The great gully was full of dashing spray and hard-thrown spouts of water. That was impossible for what hardy climber could breast the torrent dashing over the capstone? But J. was terse and harsh. “I’ve come out to climb, and there’s a route up the left of the cave that may go.” In five breathless minutes we had scrambled up the staircase of rocks, with the waters beating about us, and were inside the gloomy cave. Thrice gloomy this, for the flood curtain cut off nearly all the poor glimmer which within the mist passed for day. The roar seemed terrific, as though all the torrent thunders for a week were confined within this narrow cleft. However, the ledges at the back were well remembered, and soon our eyes became accustomed to the feeble light. J. was knotting the rope preparatory to going into action—action which promised to be difficult. The walls of the cavern were pouring; at the back a foot-wide column of white came down, and through tiny gaps between the fixed stones and the living rock great spouts were squirting. Wherever one stood a jet of water raked the position, not to appreciably greater discomfort, for we had long been drenched to the skin. “Up,” I yelled into J.’s ear, pointing to the ledges where the water was less evident. He heard not my voice in the turmoil, but his hand signalled “Down”. And down it was with the rope threaded to give safe descent of the staircase of rocks within the water-smoke.

J., however, had still an unsatisfied longing, a craving for a rock climb. If the gullies were waterways, there was still hope of better going on the buttresses. And here we clung on the edge of waterfalls, swarmed up inclined planes of rock where holds for hands and feet were invisible,

footed grass ledges which threatened at every moment to break away. Here and there were bosses of moss, green cushions sponged large with rain. A couple of hundred feet of this were enough, and the ascent of the fine ridge above was voted impossible for the day. So after four hours of arduous work the rope was taken off. Let it be hill-walking until the weather improved—or time was up, whichever came earlier.

Yes, there is glorious work on the bens when the weather is less than favourable. The man who stays indoors on a showery day loses some fine scenes and effects. J., I believe, in very truth, loves the wet weather, the drop-bejewelled bracken, the swinging bog, the stony windswept shoulder which leads up to the summit—and well he may. For the wind, the rain, the mist are a solace to the spirit, a zest to the limbs and brain. No wonder our ancient legends people the mist-realm with fairies, with alluring, if sinister, creatures. And no wonder that the hiss, the whistle, the boom, the shriek of the wind in the crags was held to be the gathering-call of mighty, but invisible, armies. There's nothing dull in a ridge-walk on a day of close-hung mist. There is an impressiveness in the blue "lift" of open space to right and to left; there is an eloquence on the rocky ledge melting off into space; there is freedom, there is happiness, there is life and vigour in the free wind charging at you from the salt sounds of the Hebrides, or across the heathery moors of old Caledonia. Of course, some little experience and patience is necessary, particularly the latter. A hill walker who takes his opinion to pieces every five minutes and alters direction, is not likely to be a success either for distance or pleasure.

The views in the mist-breath, that zone of broken light and shade, where the day and the clouds wage continual battle, are charming ever. Even the "dullest" moor is sometimes radiant—when the mist has trailed its robe across, and the sun strikes a million jewels from grass and bracken and heather. There is the corrie too—now deep in gloom as a cataract of vapour falls over the circling cliffs, now bright in its green and crimson, with white of sphagnum, and bronze of upturned peat, when the eye of the sun peeps between two mighty clouds. There is the distant lochan and there is the sea-loch, silver and blue, ruffled, shimmering, dull, and shadow-calm by wondrous sequence, rapid change. The distances leaping into view, the island's blue shadows in far-off ocean; and next moment a sweep, and Nature, the great artist, has painted an impenetrable film across her picture.

Away in the world of mist, the spirit of exploration, of adventure may be felt. The moor is swept with billows of rain, is dark with cloud, and only a circle of fifty yards is discernible. Over yonder, in a corner of the heather waste, is a tiny notch of rock with an ancient name. We will find it. Compass in hand, turning left or right to avoid bog and pool, yet ever constant to the needle's direction, we push on—and hit the place. Or it may be that the ben falls away into the mist, splintered into a number of buttresses, all strangely alike, crowded together, yet only one carrying the route we need.

FEEL OF THE ROCKS

On the mistiest day the climber can never mistake the feel of the rock beneath his hands. There is the gabbro of Skye, so rough of surface that without gloves it has to be clutched warily and must always be climbed in good style—inclined to slabbishness, to rear on edge into crazy pinnacles and ridges. This is rock made for the true climber, pocketed with simple and abundant holds, yet rising so steeply that, clinging with both hands, it is easy to look down on the sea-loch between the heels. There are weird fractures and chimneys too—places where one gropes upward in semi-darkness for scores of feet to gain a cavern, the exit from which is (maybe) a window in the opposite face of the mountain. And the Waterpipe Gully tells a tale of weeping Skye.

The cussedness of a soft trap rock has made, and marred, some sporting routes in the Coolin. The climber should consider, in his moments of heat and weariness, that this soft material acted as matrix for the lavas thrown out of the primitive volcano, a matrix which was split and battered and twisted by the immense heat and heavy pressure, leaving thin blades of crag in the most fearsome and unexpected places. In the ages of ice and rain, the soft rock has worn away and now lies in immense fans of splinters beneath every gully and tower. Here and there a step of trap has been wedged between layers of tougher material, and mighty exciting and unpleasant is the passage of some of these places. Great avalanches come away at a touch, and there seems to be no bottom to the rotten stuff. However, there are plenty of climbing routes free of such trouble, and a holiday can be spent on slabs and ridges of the best sporting material on earth.

There is a touch about the Crowberry Ridge of Buchaille Etive, which to my mind out-Coolins Skye. There is less of poor rock, less of easy going; the holds are scanty, less obvious, and the difficulties are fiercer than they look (which is not always the case in Skye). There is only a fragment of easy scree, and not the long wade up a corrie-ful. There is a certain flavour of ice and snow about the splintered column of crag which is quite foreign to the Coolin. And there are steady trickles of water and a taste of upland bog and verdure denied to the sterile fastnesses of the climbers' island. The rest of the Glencoe rock comes well to the hands; there are problems galore. Glencoe is rather famous for its winter courses, for ascents forced up snow and ice. The man who goes to Skye chooses more summer-like weather, and specializes in rock routes. Yet in passing, say, the Aonach Eagach ridge in summer there is as much of Glencoe to be gripped as the climber desires. There are some overhangs to negotiate although the course is not marked as first-rate, and the plunges from that narrow pathway are deterrent to the nervous and weak-hearted.

The Tower Ridge of Ben Nevis can never be anything but a gentleman; he is a dour adversary when you are fighting up his steep, exposed shoulder; he is a firm ally when you prepare to tackle the uppermost slabs where the snow becomes a real problem, but he is never the playful

friend one finds in the Coolins, where much time and patience is expended in unhooking garments so shrewdly clutched by the rocks. There is a gully on Carn Dearg of Ben Nevis which is full of avalanche snow at midsummer, an easy-looking corridor on the face of the upper mountain. But the wight who essays a direct ascent from the snow will find the rocks resisting in determined fashion. Not a grip will they give; not a ledge do they offer; a giant among climbers may force his way, but for the average man the best route is to outflank the main brow and scramble up elsewhere.

There is a peak in Ardgour which gives a pleasant day of sport, but nowhere does the rock feel like resistance. The climber may indeed almost play on the ridges, taking them by either wall or cleft, just as desired. But there is nothing so humorous as that finger of rock on the main ridge of the Coolin which has been nicknamed the "Gendarme". He stands full square across the narrow blade of stone, and can only be passed by climbing up to his neck and swinging the body past his burly shoulders. The evolution is sensational, and no mistakes are permitted while in the embrace of this stony constable.

If their trick of looking massive can be forgiven, there is pleasure in being a guest of Ben Arthur, the Cobbler and his Wife. On first acquaintance I was deluded, seeing the apparition of great giants looming through mist and storm. On the clear morrow, there was a comparatively mean wall of rock on a commonplace hillside. The rock has indeed a fine face, but no backing of character. But let us be just to the Cobbler and his Wife; there are tough problems for those who seek and do not avoid the real work among the rocks.

There are at least 25 recognized rock climbs on the Cobbler, varying from very severe and exposed, through severe and exposed, severe, very difficult, difficult to moderate. Compared with Glencoe the rock affords few handholds, and a fine degree of balance is necessary. In rain the rock is slippery, but much clearing of loose ledges and mud has made the place more interesting. The technical difficulties remain. It is no longer a practice ground for off-days, but a climbers' area of its own.

There is no great expanse of visible rock among the granite peaks of Grampian and Cairngorm, but here and there sheep walk or deer track breaks away and shows the bare bones of the land. Certainly they are sound enough in quality, but the sport they offer is not of the highest order. There is too much really fine climbing in Scotland for anything below the first-class to be greatly appreciated. I spent a happy day exploring the Posts of Corrie Arder, but without discovering a Church Door, or a Tower Ridge. The going was never contracted enough to be sensational (as I recollect), and the watercourse which had attracted my eye was merely steep and slimy. There is a gully opposite Clachaig in Glencoe superior to this, yet rarely visited by climbers. On Lochnagar there are said to be a famous rock-climb or two, but my visits to the Royal peak have only been in winter when snow work offered.

North again, in Ross and Sutherland there are good peaks, where the grip of the rocks is essential, and where ridge walks need a measure of skill as well as of care. The feel of the rocks—I weary to put thoughts into action, and to go to the rocky heights, gripping, balancing, planning, climbing—enjoying the best sport Britain can offer to her sons.

AUTUMN VISION

In the clear, warm splendour of this autumn afternoon, the rocks above, around, allure me into tracing new climbing courses, to be adjured as “fantastic” on future inspection. Up, up slope the cliffs of the corrie, their terraces marked with tufts of grass, their wet slabs green and gold with moss. Here a splash of vivid coral shows the crevice where lurks the mountain-ash or rowan: there a line of crimson tells the stronghold of the blooming heather. Up there, on the slant, is a rusty-brown fringe where the bilberries have fruited and are now passing to their winter sleep. There is the sage green of the dwarf willow, the light green of the parsley fern, the silver and orange of the lichen, and in the wall at one’s feet the lush flat caps of the pennywort and the full drapery of film and cushion moss. Today the rocks look very accessible indeed. Every handhold, every ledge, every crack is etched clearly. Difficulties vanish where holds seem so many and slopes so accommodating. The swing-out, from the gully where one’s hand-grips are all that prevent a fall to the screes far below seems a mere trifle, and where I have crawled with caution, trusting chiefly to friction of clothing against a smooth slab there seems grip enough and to spare. And the thought is born that the rock-wall to the right of the cave-pitch will certainly “go” despite its ferocious aspect. But climbing these dream-routes is quite another story. After all our modest “difficult” course there is contentment for the day.

To the uninitiated the scene around, above, below, is terrific. I look at the ledge where, on the first trip many a year ago, paucity of handholds above and tottering inches of sod below made progress cautious and laborious indeed. There is rare charm in the outlook. Across the narrow ravine a great slab of rock leans out, overhangs, and the lines of water-drops can be traced falling through the air and far out on the screes below. Any climber venturing a direct ascent would come off, with deplorable results to himself and party. The true course crouches for a while in the angle next the ben, then slants boldly along scarce visible ledges to the broken outer edge where “the climbing, though somewhat sensational, becomes easy”. True enough for a technical handbook, but in a such place one likes to feel the pull above of the rope, and to take a “certain amount” of assistance. At our back the rock-wall towers up to a tremendous point, and presents all sorts of lively climbs, but my favourite is the tiny crack which used to be just enough to hold a man and passes to the left of its mass. I felt so secure when out-turned knees and elbows held sufficiently to keep me from falling—a security which becomes a joke when the body is caught in some obscure narrower place and progress depends on the

other chaps holding the rope. Truly in years does the girth of a man increase!

Outward there is a fine vista across loch and moor to the ocean where tides of blue and purple and silver are slowly twining in and out among reefs and islets and bays. The gorge goes down a few broken steps, then falls away into eloquent space. The burn racing white down the upper glen is the next feature, and there is a feeling of detachment from mundane affairs. This is the view of the eagle from its eyrie (and certainly a few years ago a malodorous pile of sticks and wool and vile flesh was stacked on a ledge not 50 feet away).

There is little to be seen of the handiwork of man from this point. The alpine line and rucksack seem an intrusion just as much as the dry road which wanders along the shore of the sea-loch seeking as it seems, some forgotten, deserted, hamlet. There are no sounds up here save the lispings of the breeze, the drip-drop of the springs and the droning of distant water-breaks. Eagles, ravens, buzzards, even the evil wailing curlews are away, and all is at peace.

While I have thought and remembered—yes, and forgotten a few troubles new and old—a purple shadow has fallen over the sea-loch and the cloudlets overhead have taken on a golden glory. It is the signal of declining day—the hour for leaving these ancient haunts has come and must not be ignored, else half the night may be spent in wading bogs and streams in a vain endeavour to reach the hidden quarters of our kins. So down the ladder of rocks, down the corrie, across the bog, the ford, and on to the well-worn, if stony, path before the first halt is called. The great basin is swamped in violet mist, but high above, like the towers and spires of a sacred city, rise the rocks into the evening sky. And, poised just over the summit of the highest, glitters the evening star, a lantern of the heavens indeed. A sober sadness broods along the twilit moor as though memory had there a dwelling, and there is a softer note from the torrent of the salmon pools. My thoughts blend further and further into the minor note of coming night, but up there star after star shines out in full promise.





GLORY OF MOUNTAIN ROADS
FORDS AND HIGHEST PATHS

OH! the happy mornings when the sun shone bright, the air was cool and scented, when wind and muscle were keen and fresh. To the eye of youth and age alike, the distant peaks seemed to beckon, the glens and corries to unfold in raptures, and the miles seemed short. Up, up, one's boots tramped the mountain road; it was spring, and I felt that they were treading on air, with the larks carolling above, the grouse calling and winging below, with the dipper and ring-ouzel in the rocky ghylls, and great eagles flaunting and wheeling in the bright azure morning. Oh!

And ho! The grim ending of the day. Footsore and weary, the wall of mountains had still to be faced, but they were withdrawn, cold and aloof. The road still rose and fell, fold after fold of its dull ribbon unwound along dreary slopes. Most smelled was the mud of the peat-hags, and the wail of curlew, raucous voice of carrion crow, and plaint of plover rang through the air. Ruddy, stony, interminable, abominable, unspeakable was that road among the mountains with here an intruding fringe of rushes, there an encroaching tuft of heather. Upward, ever upward, with never a slack, never a sign of the pass, always straining forward, with the dull afternoon ruining the distant views and choking my very life.

Such again and again was my experience. Each morning delight, each evening a meagre task accomplished taunted my weariness. But the lover of mountain roads never repents. Every spring, every summer, every autumn, every winter, we foregather and the maps are produced, coned and fresh tours measured off.

Here in the Highlands several mountain roads are attributed to the military genius and engineering skill of General Wade. After the Risings of 1715 and 1719 it became essential to overawe the clans until the none-too-popular Hanoverian kings made secure their grip on the throne in London. Wade planned exceedingly well: the lines of communication to his garrisons could not readily be cut. But, though he used many of the old bealachs or passes, the scenic did not count. His ideal road was one on which regiments could march four abreast, where cavalry could trot, and along which artillery could be taken, avoiding cramped glens and places likely for ambushes. And, to secure this, many of his roads pass through dull country indeed.

My great memories of mountain roads were collected chiefly in pre-motor days. Nowadays the popular routes and passes are apt to be dusty, oily, and thoroughly unpleasant to the walker. In that time of initiation, I walked through the pass of Leny and up Glen Ogle to Killin. It was

October, and the coppices flared red and yellow; the pines were red-hot bars beneath green-blue canopies; the heather a mantle of deep chocolate varied by the golden birches and rosy-red aspens of the burn-sides, and the rich green of moss in the springs. The lochans, the burns, the springs gave of their delights, and how I reeled off the miles. All the way I felt that there must be something very wonderful round the next corner—say the ruined chapel of St. Bride in the meadow near Loch Lubnaig or that black-looking tarn with ever-prattling waves which nestles under the ridges at the head of Glen Ogle.

In a later year there was a crossing from Bridge of Orchy to the sea during the last days of December. As the train crawled by Loch Lomond the peaks were capped in white, and the sky behind was dark, stormy, portending evil. Such a threat had been with us for days, and we were inclined to take a little risk. As it happened, the storm tarried until we were well out on the moor of Rannoch, far from shelter, and then between gale and snow we had a stern struggle. The day was quenched at noon. Drifts, fleeces of snow were everywhere, and the wind seemed to shift to every quarter. At best in those days the way was faintly marked, and we knew the penalty of straying into the maze of lochans and bogs around. Only by careful scouting and groping did we win progress. The lights of King's House could scarcely penetrate the storm to the road, but at last we staggered into the inn's warm shelter.

On the morrow the gale was still strong, and great billows of snow pounded against the house at intervals, though on the whole less frequently as the day wore on. Tramping through such would be at least risky; as our itinerary allowed a day to spare we made no foolish attempt. At night-fall came clear air, and a full moon shone down on a remarkable scene. Every now and again Buchaille Etive would shoulder up through flying snow-smoke, and the horizon was dimmed by white plumes torn and harried by the storm devils. But around us, in shelter, was peace, peace broken only by the eerie roars and shrieks of the wind among the great crags and along the frozen wastes.

By morning the snow-clouds had departed, though sometimes a stinging, whistling gust reminded us that the gale had not yet granted truce. However, we started out and found our road nearly swept clear of snow, though at times, particularly in the pass of Glencoe, long detours up the hillsides were made to avoid deep, soft drifts. As seen from "The Study", the mountain ranges are always impressive, but on this day with blizzards wandering among the high peaks, blotting out this one, accentuating that, showing great corners and spikes, black rock faces and pinnacles, the effect was beyond words. And we thanked our good fortune that the journey would end in the deep shelter of Glencoe, and that there was to be no wild adventure over the Devil's Staircase by which General Wade's road from Rannoch Moor goes on toward Fort William.

This moor of Rannoch and pass of Glencoe lacks the high altitude of the pass of Corrie-yarrick. On that crossing rain in torrents took the place

of snow, and the burns brawled mid-leg deep across the tracks. At the fords and broken bridges were perilous passages. The gale was even more blasting than beneath the Shepherds of Etive; in the most exposed stretches progress was by short rushes when the gusts had blown themselves weak. Our plight was pretty bad, but by no means so serious as that of a family of Highland "tinkers" who had been compelled to bivouac just short of the summit, and were waiting, hungry and apathetic, for the wind to abate. The chief man of the party was confident of their ability to retire, if the wind should not abate at sunset, to the last farm by the way-side, though he wished strongly to get on to Fort Augustus.

On the mountain roads of England I have had many lively experiences. The "Helm Wind", caused by the contending of warm and most westerly breezes against the dry and cold easterly gales from the Continent, occasionally make the crossing of the Pennine Passes of Cumberland and Westmorland a risky matter. When buildings are unroofed, trees torn up and displaced, and stacks scattered in ruin, the over-setting of a neighbour's dog-cart on the open road is a minor mishap. Luckily I had not accepted the proffered lift, and so was a witness of, and not a participator in, the spill. I have been on Kirkstone, Westmorland's grandest road pass, when fog and darkness caused belated travellers to take refuge in the tiny inn at the summit. There was "standing room only" for about thirty people. For a really fine night ramble we used to select the crossing of Dunmail Raise, a pass less than 900 feet in height, between Westmorland and Cumberland. This takes you along the main road between Windermere and Keswick, past Rydal Water and Grasmere and Thirlmere, and on a summer was intolerable with traffic. But in winter moonlight, nothing of this was recalled. The great hills in light and shade looked down on a peaceful Grasmere, and the planets peeped to see their reflections in the little lake in the hollow of the cup-like valley. Hoarse whispers come from the ghylls where tiny streams were bursting among the rocks, wheeling in smooth-worn pools, glinting over pebbly shallows. From the Raise, the view to the north was to a confusion of rocky summits. The river-like Thirlmere swept on between woods and crags, and rocky islets, a bit of hammered silver, and ere long Helvellyn showed its smoother brae to the right. Everything seemed so vast, man seemed so small, so trivial his woes and troubles in this abiding, surrounding peace.

In the old days I made infrequent visits to the mountain roads of Wales and the impressions are vague. The pass of Llanberis is fine: one afternoon we stood awhile at the foot watching the clouds creeping and pouncing, soaring and falling in the cwms and through the bwlchs of great Snowdon—thin sun-filled clouds which at sunset turned into garments of rose and gold while the night shadows beneath turned to purple and blue and cold grey.

For the finest of morning scenes on our mountain roads I must return to the pass of Drumochter in the Grampians. At sundown our walk had started. The gloom of night settled in the corries, but never quite con-

quered the ridges and peaks of the mountains, and the sky was ever bright—to the dimming of stars. Hour after hour we tramped at an easy pace, passing from the oak woods to the forests of larch and pine, to the naked heights where the sweeping gales forbid growth larger than the tough heather. At first a great river moaned and sighed and murmured from pool to pool, then we were in the presence of a raving torrent, thundering over cascades and down ladders of rock, and finally the only sound was the tinkle of a rill falling over a ledge of stone. Now the night haze shrunk into the mountain coves; it was full day in the valley though the sun still tarried. Then, in the eastern sky, there was a flash of gold, a finger laden with rose touched the cloud-fluffs high above. Quietly around us Nature was breathing to its awakening. The larks sprang up and called, they wheeled up and up to reach the higher light, and there burst into melody. The grouse were restless in the heathers, the deer stole back to their far-off sanctuaries. A flash of gold on the Boar of Badenoch was answered by a gleam on the Sow of Atholl. Down-bending the messengers of day caught peak after peak, lower and still lower, until only the throat of the pass lay in shadow. Then a warm glory swept around, and another day had come to the mountain road.

And now, having written these memories, I pause. There is keen pleasure in memory though the pen fails to paint truly things either great or small. There is happiness in recalling days that are gone, so that others may read and enjoy, may be led even to experiment and to carry forward to another generation the cult of the mountain road.

SOME FORDS

I would like to write a history of personal experiences at British fords and ferries. Particularly the former. From Dorset on the English Channel right up to Caithness there has been a bewildering variety, ancient and modern, used and unused, safe and dangerous, easy and difficult. In the Outer Hebrides there are perilous crossings of sea-sounds and tidal-firths. At the head of Morecambe Bay in Lancashire, the old-time mail-coach with other vehicles, cattle, sheep and people on foot made an everyday practice of a ten-mile journey across open sands. To Holy Island in Northumberland there is a ford at low tide. In the past the holders of great coast castles saw to it that the approaches were unsafe to enemies—and they made quite a lot of risks for the bringing of supplies and garrisons.

In the ancient days bridges were scarce in Scotland. Even in well-settled parts only small burns or broad, shallow and equable streams were snapped. For every bridge in the coaching days (say a century and a half ago), there were a score fords. Down along the Border it was illegal to open up a ford which was not certified in the laws between the two countries. In the wild north and north-west of Scotland bridges were entirely unknown. Fords and ferries were never really liked. Too often the Tweed or Esk would paralyse war-like movements on both sides of the Border for a week or more; the torrents from the Cheviots and the Moffat hills

would send down brown, turbid floods, and quite often forces in battle array were drawn up opposite each other, with a rushing, uncompromising river between.

The coming of the iron bridge means the extinction of the ford except in unoccupied wilderness. A stage-coach might splash through a yard-deep stream without damage, but not so a locomotive. Nor yet a motor-car. So the watersplash must be eliminated. A girder and cement bridge is convenient and takes but little time to place.

As an obstacle the ford may have vanished near towns and cities. It still remains an element, picturesque and sometimes tiresome to the wanderer by car among the Scottish hills. There is a broken bridge on General Wade's old military road over Corrieyarrick to Fort Augustus which often involved a detour because the Yarrick burn is in spate. When Wade's roads came, the Highland chiefs petitioned against the institution of bridges in the glens, giving the naïve reasons that such dry-shod travel was enervating to their clansmen, and likely to cause the shirking of necessary fords in the upper glens. Certainly the Highlander of that time claimed no high standard of comfort, but the complaint was too artificial to receive attention. Concerning water splashes a few may still be found near Edinburgh where cars and other vehicles take the water, but nowhere is the foot-passenger compelled to do so.

In the deer and grouse districts of Scotland, there are still fords in the full meaning of the word, though often the man on foot finds a narrow plank or a pair of larch trunks with rough battens nailed across. These are bouncy and uncertain, and gale, flood and storm often make them dangerous. I recall vividly one where only the balance secured by an ice-axe prevented me rolling full length into the swift stream. Stepping-stones of the order found and pictured in South Britain may be quite useless in a great upper glen. The boulders might be too heavy for the floods to dislodge, but they would divert the flow into another channel through the soft peat and beds of pebbles. The condition of the fords on even the least-used right-of-way is of importance, but many are breached, neglected and become dangerous. One ancient ford is reported as being gradually eaten away and its place filled by the great pool beneath a waterfall. Forest and moor tenants will keep their driving roads and fords safe, but many rights-of-way pass along the marches where naturally the interest of the proprietors is not so great.

Down in Southern England where the clear chalk streams meander daintily along, there is something formal, even to a Northern eye exotic, about the ford which is elaborately shelved from corn-land to river-depths and back again. The picture has little vigour, for there is no indication of struggle with flood, of peril brooding along the flat waters. In the Highlands the ford is seen at its best and its worst. Here the ancient traffic preferred to travel inland, across even the tops of glens where the rivers were less formidable. The ford is a disappearing institution, a link with the primitive life. After all, as friend Donald puts

it, a ford is a good thing well by, and your porridge is not apt to go cold in the waiting if a heavy rain has been falling on the hills.

HIGHEST PATHS

Round the fire someone mentioned the crossing of Scotland's highest paths as likely to be of interest; they would be none too easy, but neither difficult nor dangerous. The veteran promptly derided the inclusion of the Mounth paths east of Lochnagar, the King's mountain, because they were short and up to a century ago well used by drovers, harvesters, and cattle. The Devil's Elbow track above Spital of Glen Shee did not qualify because it is always passable for motor vehicles. This Cairnwell road is the highest in Scotland, rises to 2199 feet, and was built by the Hanoverian soldiers between 1750 and 1754, when their garrisons still held the castles and patrolled the Highland routes. "Otherwise it is a good pass. I crossed it when the snow posts were buried, and it was hard to keep the route in the mist."

"The loftiest right-of-way is the Monega pass, which rises to 3318 feet, crossing from the Braemar area of Upper Dee to Glen Isla." Here, instead of the veteran's diffuse description, let me continue Mr. Henry Alexander's notes from his book, *The Cairngorms*:

The route leaves the Cairnwell road at the Sheann Spittal (i.e. Old Spittal) Bridge, where the driving road crosses the Cluny from the east to the west bank, and it holds up the east bank of the stream past the old bridge, which still spans the stream. A hospice stood here in olden times. Ascending the long spur, known as Sron na Gaoithe, one has a fine view of the northern corrie of the Glas Maol, in which a big snow wreath or cornice often lies till late in the spring.

The summit plateau is reached (3318 feet), the track passing less than half a mile east of the cairn of Glas Maol, after which it skirts the western edge of the deep Caenlochan glen, and finally descends the fine buttress of Monega Hill to Tulchan (1368 feet), at the head of Glen Isla, whence a road runs down to Kirkton of Glenisla (hotel: 22 miles from Braemar); and on to Alyth station (10 miles below the Kirkton).

The prospect from Glas Maol is a remarkable one—its cairn was one of the points in the Principal Triangulation of the United Kingdom. Caenlochan at the head of Glenisla was a famous hunting ground of the early Scottish kings. The least willow, the smallest of British trees, is found in abundance in Caenlochan. Its height, which is measured by inches, sometimes causes it to be mistaken for a grass.

Another interesting way goes south along road and lane from Braemar to Loch Callater, 1627 feet, in five miles. Then cairns mark a path along the east side of the loch, which is glacial, narrow and shallow, and a mile long. After this the rights-of-way goes through the mazes of a wet flat, then rises steeply to the watershed, 2863 feet above sea level. The path has a good many gaps, but a gate will be seen on the skyline on the east side

of the Tolmount summit. Once the White Water glen is in sight, the path descends steeply for four miles into Glen Doll. The very steep pitch is Jock's Road. Jock was a noted smuggler and used this route while travelling from Glen Clunie Braemar to Clova. Quite another Jock is said to have been a Jacobite fugitive, whose haunt was Winter Corrie above Braedownie. The correct route keeps clear of the narrow ravine of the White Water and passes between Tolmount and the Knaps of Fafernien. A descent too much to the left brings the walker down to Backnagairn on the upper Esk before making back to Clova. Glen Doll is worth seeing and famous for deer. General Grealock, one of the most famous deer stalkers, leased the forest in 1890. After experience of 23 forests he describes Glen Doll as a very fine piece of stalking ground. The glen is narrow and deep, and the habitations placed in deep recesses: the Forfarshire district concerning it runs:

Nae wonder though the maidens of the Doll be dun,
'Twixt Hallowmas and Candlemas they never see the sun.

The path ends at Braedownie farm, three miles from Clova, and the whole distance from Braemar is 18 miles.

"Most of us," continued the veteran, "prefer loose stones or grass beneath our feet or beneath the snow. In the Cairngorm, from Braemar there is the Larig Ghru which rises to about 2800 feet, and carries the path to Aviemore and the Spey. There's never a roof from Lui Beg (Glen Derry) for a dozen miles to near Coylum Bridge. The track from Derry Lodge to Abernethy is long and can be a terror though it does not climb so high. I heard somebody recommend taking in a visit to the Shelter Stone as part of the Through Route, but it is off the track and involves some boulder trotting. Walk the whole distance, and you'll find it quite enough.

"Other high paths from the Dee go from Inverey: the old clan route past Fealar Lodge to Spital of Glen Shee is little used, but thoroughly commendable. I like to go from north to south. The lower part of the glen used to be farmed, and the banks dividing the fields are awkward if in snowtime you stray off the path. There are hollows which, drifted over, leave nasty pits. The crossing to and from Fealar is usually easy, being a long cart-track, and there is a connecting road to Spital of Glen Shee. The path from the Geldie to Blair Atholl by Glen Tilt is usually tramped without looking for variations.

"The other paths from the Geldie, a feeder of the Dee, to the Feshie and the Spey, is bleak on the Braemar side, but there are fine pine woods in Glen Feshie. It is not hard to follow. The wet weather track merely avoids the deepest bogs, across parts of which, in drought, it is possible to walk. Consider frost and snow as equal to drought, and use the bog-path. The great difficulty of the route is always the crossing of the River Eidart, which rises near the top of Cairn Toul, 4241 feet, and is a strong flowing river before it joins the Feshie. If the Eidart is in flood, the plank bridge

may be swept away, and a climb up the stream to a safe crossing on the north side may cost three hours and even more. This is serious on a cold and misty winter day when the light soon fades. For such an attempt, at any time of year, it is foolish to be scrimpy of food or of a scarf or some other extra clothing in case of delay. I have known people almost lose their lives because they would not carry a few extra ounces of bread and cheese. My own food on the hills, as you know, never includes meat, either in summer or in winter, though otherwise I am not a vegetarian. Carry sugar in some form such as dried fruits. Such diets are warming and easily assimilated.

“What about the Drumochter series of passes? That through the railway and road gap is easy at any time. I have heard that the Gaick pass from Dalnacardoch to Kingussie can be nasty when the weather is bad. The tracks confuse easily in mist and snow I am told, but my one tramp was in clear and excellent weather. And as for that pass to the west—Corrieyarrick—the chief difficulty is mileage, getting on and off the actual pass of 2543 feet. From Drumgask hotel or Laggan village, there is a rough track on the line of Wade’s military road on the floor of the Spey glen for 12 miles to Melgarve. The crossing of the pass is sure, since a footbridge was put across a bad river five miles from Fort Augustus. There the Wade bridge had broken, and the ford was impossible when any rain of moment had fallen on the mountains.”

GREY MEN OF CAIRNGORM

Eerie Experiences in High and Lonely Places

QUEER sensations, eerie experiences, come to the wanderer among the lonely hills in winter. Even what Matthew Arnold called "the cheerful silence of the fells" becomes oppressive, and every nerve tingles. To the ear, every sound is magnified. You hear footsteps where there are no men; voices, barks and even music where no hearth has ever been. To the eye, a lighter patch on the misty skyline seems to glow with distant sunshine, and the boulders distort and change places. Thrown out of gear with modern existence, you revert to a past where mystery was the only fact. With faculties in a highly receptive condition, imaginations become real. At the close of a weary, difficult day you are apt to put your personal mistakes to the wilful calls and beckonings of mountain devils and hidden witches.

On the Cairngorm mountains of Dee-side in Scotland, on a cloudy, snow day, you can hear the stealthy footsteps of "Grey Men", stalking on the edge of the mist, watching through the glimmer of the snow. I have never confronted them, though there has been terrific temptation to face about in the cloud wreath and to await the appearance of an enemy whose weight creaks the crust of the snow.

Probably my hair was "stood on end" (if such is possible), and my scalp has tingled as though I was near the centre of an electric storm. The stalking of the Grey Men is a wearying, worrying, irritating experience, and you are glad to break away to lower moors where the conditions are less abnormal. I urge you, if you in turn feel the Grey Men around you, hissing and treading in the gloom, keep your eyes on the compass: if you turn round and lose those careful bearings by card, depend on it you will face leagues of hard and mistaken travel before the right of way off the moors is found.

According to the late Fiona MacLeod:

in a Gaelic story or poem-saga clouds are called "The Homeless Clan". It is a beautiful name. But they are not homeless whom the great winds of the upper world eternally shepherd, who have their mortal hour in beauty and strength and force, and, instead of the graves and secret places of the creatures of earth, knew a divine perpetual renewal.

But when the great winds sleep, there are mischief workers astir in the gloom. For hours every step you make in the snow is echoed, muted, made secret. You are receptive enough to espy a black protrusion of rocks

above the great cauldron (in which Loch A'an is a black ruffle) as the clachan or group of cottages where the sinister Grey Men live on the edge of gloom and silence, that misty people whose converse is always in whispers and whose travels pass regularly beyond the edge of visible, measureable things. The Grey Men are watchful, maybe sinister, but always hidden, and mostly moving with only the frail shadow of noise. At least I have never heard a sound on a Grey Man's Day, only a muffled, beating step which is always coming from behind a curtain of trailing cloud.

There are other moors in wildest Scotland where you tramp with a ghost comrade, but the old path from Rannoch to Glencoe has become too well worn and occupied to hold its ancient mystery. In ordinary snow there is a groove from which fern and heather stand aside. Trackless must be the waste over which the spirits of past, present, and future ponder. You may boldly and loudly state your belief that the sound of footsteps is an echo of your own; of snow settling down or packing together over some edge of hollow in the moor. But the evidence is half-hearted—you would give delight to the yell of a golden eagle, the whistle of whaup or curlew, even the fluttering of the ptarmigan's wings, over such a breadth of weariness, that moving circle of below and grey white above, which is all the world today. Until the Loch Ness "monster" came along, the Grey Men of Cairngorm made the greatest mystery of the Highlands; and it is easy to find "footprints", big, blurred, stained and uncanny on Cairngorm snow. You remember that the early Mount Everest expeditions were reported to find man-tracks on the uppermost glaciers, and that the Tibetan monks of Rongbuk talked warily about sinister snow-dwellers who lurked about the glaciers approaching the highest mountain in the world.

The folk-lore of almost every mountain tribe in the world has its strange men or monsters who occupy the land of winter storms. The North American Indians called them the Scarlet Hunters, who drove the elk and the bison into the snow-whitened forests and prairies to save the tribes from starvation. The Swiss had prodigious legends of winter dragons who produced fires from within to keep themselves warm. The cave of the dragon was always between rock and glacier, and claw-marks and wing-touched snow were seen by the first climbers and chamois hunters after winter had passed.

The Grey Men haunt me. Personally I had rather, on a midnight of gloom, blunder into the "singing" or "whistling" sands of a lonely shore than enter into the sterile zone alone on a silent winter day. There are other queer relics in the Highlands. The low elevation of the sun makes the shadow-play of the Brocken Spectre almost constant in its appearance. A belt of cloud in the dark side, a glimmer of sunshine or noonlight across the white ride, and the great shadows begin to heave and to quiver. Lift an arm, and a great mast shoots out on the cloud; run and dodge, and every movement is followed by a giant on the distant mist-bank. It is

rather haunting, but after all it has the pleasantry of sunshine or noon-light. I never hear of "Grey Men" in Lochaber, on Ben Nevis or in Glencoe; there are other haunts among the broken hills which look from Morven and Locheil down to the Road to the Isles, to the glens where Prince Charlie and his proscribed chieftains lurked in the grim year of 1746. The country, like Skye, is too broken to be silent; on a windless day there is rattle from waterfalls in the deep glens below the frost and snow line, and in a breeze there are constant chords from cliffs and through grassy passheads.

It must be recognized that the Cairngorm is the broadest bit of high mountain in Britain. It is fitting that it should have a legendary people, a misty clan of its own. The whole of the English Lakeland could be hidden in the great wilderness which lies above 1700 feet above sea level at the springs of Dee, Don and Avon of Spey. In Wales Snowdonia is a small area in comparison with the Cairngorm mass, and the mountains there have been crossed by tracks and people until the legends of the primitive folk have become obscure. Only Snowdon itself has legends of giants; the lower cwms and nants have their kings and warriors, poets and musicians, men of action and art rather than mystery.

CHAPTER X

LONE SHIELING STORIES

From the lone shieling on the misty island,
Mountains divide us and the waste of seas;
Yet still the blood is warm, the heart is Highland,
And we in our dreams behold the Hebrides.

SO exulted the Skyeman-poet in his "Canadian Boat Song"; an exile, he was true for ever to ancient memory and abiding love. Today there are still fewer shieling folk in the Hebrides than in his time, and memories are three generations longer than they were. The glens which wind down to the sea-lochs have been steadily depopulated for so many years that no wanderer who returns can tell where stood shieling and kirkgarth, home of living and dead. There is an uncanny trick about the depopulation: a few new cots are built, while a township of old ones tumbles down or is used to repair byres and outhouses.

There are counties in Scotland where today one marches through leagues of uncultivated moors though in the first Ordnance Survey maps (only a grandfather's age away) the tracks were sprinkled with shielings worked by the hand-plough, with gardens where the spade was used. Only a red patch of fuchsia, thin and derelict, is evidence above ground of a lost community. "Ill fares the land . . . where wealth accumulates and men decay."

In winter the shielings by the western sea-lochs are particularly lonesome. In Skye and Lewis (the Long Island), the roads are often impassable through whirling mist and roaring flood. A rib of mountain, tiny on the map, may lift the pass into the region of snow, and no mails get through for weeks.

In health and plenty the isolation has no worry—we can be happy, even within a city, under such circumstances. But sickness and that constant shortage of essentials in food, which undermines the constitution, are harder to bear when assistance and neighbours are far away. Yet the shieling folk are aye friendly—I have known, for a whole winter, the baking of bannocks to be carried four miles across rock and morass because the gude-wife was ill, and the weans at home too young to be menseful in the cooking.

Bravely and quietly do the shieling folk face the winter cold and rain, long nights and short days. The shepherd has his breeding ewes near his cot and does not need to range far in pursuit of them. His autumn pay has to be invested in a stock of sound meal and other foods for the winter. The tiny poultry-run may provide a few eggs and fowls to eke out the

meagre diet. The potatoes in the little patch have to be stored with care, lest rot should set in and destroy them.

The shieling folk who depend on the sea face more serious, more strenuous times. In summer the price of fish may be so low in the west that the men scarcely win even a meagre wage, and some have to lay up their boats altogether until winter. The days then are stormy, misty, harsh, yet the lobster and crab "pots", the harvest of the sea, must be lifted, their catches placed in the well of the boat; new bait must be prepared, and the trap dropped near the sea-ledges which these crustaceans haunt. At all times the work is cold; in frost the exposure may be serious. The boat is ever in peril when the tide sets among the fangs of the rocks and reefs. The shell fish must be placed in boxes and taken either to the mainland or to some pier at which the steamer calls. For this work the reward is small and uncertain; the fishermen must pay for gear and petrol before they can place aside the wife's allowance.

For men must work and women must weep
When there's little to earn and many to keep—

is ever true of the western sea-lochs. Can you wonder that every generation the number of lads and lasses who are willing to remain in such hardships are fewer? They leave the shieling, poor land and wild seas, and only see them again in their dreams.

The fortitude of shieling folks has amazed me. I have walked along a cliff path a 100 feet above the rocks, and met a slap of sea-spray every time the stormy tide hit the reefs below. At the end of a long hour I reached the shieling, its low walls built of sea-rounded cobbles packed in with sods and earth instead of lime mortar, its roof of grass thatch held down by grass ropes weighted by stones.

Outside, all was raging wind, soaking rain, and the roar of the breakers. Within, as I passed over the threshold and the door was closed, all was darkness and peace. Round the fire of sea-battered timber or moorland peat with the children, father and mother, with a grandparent in the seat of honour. "She's deaf to all strangers, but she hears even the least of us." And I am called upon to tell the story of my arrival from distant parts. Often I catch the eager glistening in a lad's eye as I speak of places which are rather ordinary to me. "Rab wad be rare glad to go wi' ye," laughs his father, but the mother checks her breath. There are perils in the outer world for these simple bairns of the lone shielings. I recall one winter day in the Ross of Mull when I travelled from Aros along the coast-road past the Gribun for 20 miles almost, and then took to a hill-path. It was the last week of the year, and Postman John with his vanload of parcels was particularly welcome. "It's all right," he assured me; "these folks with their parcels have no troubles worth mentioning. Go to them that cannot afford the post if you wish to see decent poverty." Then he told me where and how to walk.

He stopped his direction to adjure a chiel who had answered his Gaelic question in school English: "Never be ashamed of your own mother's tongue." "Father's Gaelic as well," was the pert response, also in English. John has no dislike of the English at all, but he loves the old language, and speaks it to every person likely to understand. So I went over the hills and along a moorland path, carrying a few presents for a lonely family. Thanked I was, of course, but it was as much for the thought as for the gifts. At such a place I had a rebuke: the bay was white with storm, and yet the lobster fishers were going out. My remark, justifiably strong, was met: "Jesus himself was the friend of fishermen, and He calmed the stormy sea, and brought fish to the nets." Had I spoken thus rashly to Wullie, a shieling shepherd of Sutherland, he would have said: "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want."

Cynics may declare that both allusions are misapplied, but the men and women of the shieling by the sea-loch and mountain are people of Faith, Faith which has my respect, which makes them happy even in the harshest times. Hunger is never far from their doors yet these lonely people survive. In December they look forward to the spring, and quote the Gaelic proverb that December is blessed; neither tempest can whelm nor flood drown thee, for thy name is the Resurrection and the Life.

The fisherfolk dwell in little townships, often isolated for days by flood and storm. Once I came down to such a shieling where the woman turned with a stifled scream of surprise. "Is it all right?" "Certainly it is not wrong," I replied. Her man and son had gone across the stormy sound in their boat for food supplies. It was late and stormy, and they had not returned. However I could hear the oars chunking and the delay was due to a tricky wind which had caused them to row the whole distance there and back.

In a wild glen, one spring, my appearance was hailed with satisfaction. "If you can get in and out, then surely our grocer can bring the orders to the foot of the great lock ladder alongside the waterfall, and we will carry them up. It may not seem much to you, sir, but for a months we have had no tea, and little sugar, and only milk and oatmeal bannocks or porridge for every meal." In my wilderness wanderings I have always carried my own food supplies and a little more. The gude-wife then does not count the extra mouth a liability. Potatoes usually disappear before the end of winter.

Gaelic is the fireside talk of the shieling, but they will use English with, and to, any outsider. The children come home from school in October, and will not cross the marsh and river ford again until March. At the mother's desire I take a school "class", gently correcting or suggesting here and there, but avoiding all questions I cannot answer. At home I am rather intelligent, but the fireside scholar is a terror. His questions have been conned over in his active little brain for a long time, and it is not easy to give a clear reply. "They haven't much chance," sighs Mother, as they

are herded back into the bedroom at sunset, and I make my way through the drifts and rock passage to the glen.

Cleanliness is next to Godliness with many shieling women. With a roof of thatch, a fireplace from which smoke and ashes may whirl at any moment into every recess, causing your eyes to flow with tears, a clean table and clean linen would seem impossible. But they are not.

The doorway is often window and chimney at times. I recall an old shepherd who every morning stood across his threshold and took off his bonnet. "I give thanks to God for his good world," he said. The meal in the barrel might be short yet this was a good world. Another of his simple ceremonies was: ere he entered the door at sunset, he would look out, north, south, east and west, to see whether God had sent him a guest, a wanderer who would be welcome for the night. The door had no latch, no lock—it's protection was

O King of Stars!

Whether my house be dark or bright,
Never shall it be closed against anyone,
Lest Christ close His House against me.

Low was the lintel: I am short but its bar struck my forehead yet I felt that I was in the presence of a better man than many who dwelt in great castles.

One of the last times I went out to the Hebrides, the captain of the little steamer saddened me. He was gently ruminating over the miscellaneous cargo laid out on the quay, and pointed out that most of it meant food. "The Isles, I am sorry to say it, are not self-supporting. If the food supplies from outside were stopped for a month, many of the shieling folk would starve." To him, shieling folk meant those in townships within reach of the road and pier, and not the real lonely people who are cut off from the rest of the world for most of winter, whether in health or in sickness, in plenty or in hunger.

CHAPTER XI

AMONG THE BENS

(a) BEN NEVIS: BRITAIN'S HIGHEST PEAK

Perfect Winter Days—Twenty Hours on the Ben—Rock Climbs—Ridge Walker's Paradise—Mamore Forest—Glen Nevis: Scotland's Grandest Gorge.

AWAY in Lochaber, near the western coast, rise Scotland's highest and finest mountain group, with Ben Nevis, 4406 feet, the highest point in the British Isles. Many years ago, because newspaper editors preferred articles on "Ben Nevis: Scotland's Highest Peak" I almost served an apprenticeship on walks and climbs there. Just before Easter and Christmas I was fairly often at work in the group. In the course of years I stormed (mostly alone) most of the ridges, all the tops over 3000 feet, and many corries, describing the incidents either in the open or during the ensuing evening. The editorial wish that Easter and Christmas copy must be in the office two or three days before the stated season meant that the contributor had to be in Lochaber, Glencoe, or the Cairngorms the previous week. When on the hills incidents had to occur; with Ben Nevis in its usual bad humour there was no lack of them. On one occasion I witnessed at close, but not perilous, quarters a thundering avalanche on the North Face.

After bagging the peak as my "duty", there was a day or a week-end to spare for venturing into other parts of the group. Looking back I feel amused at the risks taken, at the heterogenous comrades who were picked up, and the good fellows who helped me up steep snow, gave me advice, and solved the moderately difficult rock faces and towers, which are a feature of the ben itself. When I began climbing in Scotland I was already the honorary editor and publisher of a mountaineering annual (equally honorary but work shared by my wife and young family). I was in touch with ridge-walking as well as rock-climbing, and knew all the changes of the mountains. My girls were grown up before they saw Lochaber in summer at the behest of their mother who had declared her intention in that particular year of ascending at Easter, Snowdon in North Wales; at Whitsun, Scafell Pike in Cumberland; in early August, Ben Nevis, highest in the British Isles, and late in that month Slieve Donard, highest in Ulster. Oh yes—I was still searching for copy, and contrasted that misty day on the Tourists' Path with snowy approaches in winter.

The highest peak in Lochaber is Ben Nevis, 4406 feet, with its satellites both called Carn Dearg (Red Rock, one of the commonest and least discriminating place name in the Highlands). That to the north-west is 3961 feet, and is a great landmark, with many rock and snow climbs on





the northern front. Ben Nevis has a definite cone from this side, and drifts and wreaths of snow lie most of the year. The ruin (in winter masked in snow) is that of an observatory which has been abandoned for many years. The south-west Carn Dearg, 3348 feet, rises steeply and without incident from Nevis, directly above the waterfall and road bridge. To reach the next 4000 foot ridge, Carn Mor Dearg (4120 feet), descent must be made for nearly 1000 feet by a steep loose slope to a narrow arete, which curves round and gives the noblest view of the great northerly face of the Ben, with 2500 feet of rocks. The ridge continues, narrow and with fine outlooks, to Carn Dearg Meadhonach, 3875 feet, and to Carn Beag Dearg, 3264 feet, about a mile of the finest walkers' ridge in Britain. Still another 4000 foot ridge stands to the east, and this area is counted as two mountains—Aonach Beag, 4060 feet, with the outliers Coire Bealach, 3644 feet, and Sgurr a'Bhuic, 3165 feet, North-east of Aonach Beag the top of Aonach Mor rises to 3999 feet, one foot below the 4000. The ridge is certainly worth including in the round by a party of strong walkers. The satellites of Mor are Stob an Cul Choire, 3580 feet, Stob Coire an Fhir Dhuibh, 3250 feet, and Tom na Sroine, 3015 feet.

Seen from Lochaber, Ben Nevis and his colleagues seem to be very high and immensely broad, with great buttresses lifting the summits. In this latitude the line of permanent snow should be about 5000 feet above sea level, but the group, within a few miles of the Atlantic and the first barrier to meet mild ocean air currents, does not favour a permanent snow-cap. December is the wettest month, largely melted snow, with January next. July usually brings the top of Ben clear of snow, and the drifts or cornices shrink in August and September. The following authoritative statement about "permanent snow" on Ben Nevis comes from the Scottish Mountaineering Club's volume on "Ben Nevis", published in 1936:

It is said that in Sept., 1933, all the snow had disappeared from Ben Nevis for the first time on record. On Sept. 28, 1935, I visited all the places on Ben Nevis where snow is known to lie and found not a trace anywhere; but as new snow was falling before the party left the mountain three days later, it is probable that only for a few days was Ben Nevis devoid of permanent snow. There had been a great accumulation on Sept. 2.

Moreover the three points where the group rises about 4000 feet are restricted in area, and formed of practically narrow ridges. In the Cairngorm mountains further east, with half Scotland between them and the wet Atlantic winds no ben may rise as high as the actual summit of Ben Nevis, but the extent above 4000 feet on either Ben Macdhuì or Braeriach is larger than Lochaber's total. As the 3000 feet contour 15 flat-topped Cairngorms exceed the area of the Lochaber peaks.

The hill-walker uses the tourist path from Fort William towards the summit of the Lochan Meall an t-Suidhe, about 1800 feet above sea level,

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Ben Lui in Winter garb, showing the Central Gully

Photo by Douglas Scott

then strikes direct for the 3000 feet, contour on Carn Dearg, and then turns right for its summit. From this point, 3961 feet, to the Ben itself, in high summer, is a great upland all scattered with screes and outcrops, with little trace of grass and more of moss and lichens. At other seasons it is more or less complete snow. The view all round is superb: the west is taken up by the Atlantic Ocean, and its nearer isles; there are glens and peaks in every direction, and the grandest colour. The north side of the up-tilted mountain drops away in impressive fashion, and at intervals there are snips and deep wrinkles in its edge where the gullies have cut back into it. In mist, with snow on the ground, care should be taken to keep clear of the edge.

Beyond the observatory a keen delight awaits the hill walker. The upper mountain-cap ends in a quick drop of about 1200 feet to a bealach or land-bridge beyond which the ridge aims for Carn Mor Dearg, 4102 feet, with finest views of the rock towers and faces above the Mhuillin glen. After following this ridge with its wonderful outlooks for a mile, it is possible to drop down some scree and stone gully of Carn Beag Dearg into the glen, and after passing along the foot of many mighty cliffs to cross to the Lochan Meall an t-Suidhe by way of the shoulder of Carn Dearg. There is a gate in the deer fence to give the easiest direction. I prefer to recommend a return to Carn Mor Dearg, descent to a col and to climb the Aonach ridge, first going north to the Mor top which is 3999 feet, and then to Beag, 4066 feet. From this both Spean Bridge and Fort William are six and a half miles distant in a line. I have dropped down to the Glen Nevis track and Fort William because that town has been my resting place.

In my hard walking days I started with a party from the railway at Corrour with the intention of doing Ben Nevis and the Horse-shoe of 4000 feet peaks, on the way to Fort William. I was outclassed, and left behind, but I was able to get in all the ridges in the list, and arrived by the shore of Loch Linnhe three hours after the others. Some of that party had not slept during the railway journey from England, but that made no apparent difference to their speed and staying power.

My first view of Ben was from the skirts of a snow-squall. Away above the windswept pines a white smoke was wrestling against the grey buttresses and eddying over the snowy summit behind. Since then I have made many expeditions, but who expects anything but storm on ventures into Lochaber between November and May. In that first week there was the gale-day which scooped water from the lochan behind Meall an t-Suidhe. There was the day of heavy rain, the day with a rattle of hail and sleet, and the day when the flurry of snow hid the leader of the small party, and only careful steering by compass took us up and down the mountain. Then came the day when all four evils hurtled together, and there was the blue glare of lightning and a roll of thunder that almost stunned us. After that we took an off-day from the Ben and endeavoured to trace the march of Montrose's clans on the day before the battle of

Inverlochy, and were almost drowned in a false ford through a roaring torrent.

Of a surety Ben Nevis under storm conditions is a place to be avoided by anyone who values his comfort. Yet somehow the climber finds himself once again on the track to the Allt a Mhullin, and consoles himself that the great crags and gullies are sheltered in even the wildest weather.

PERFECT WINTER DAYS

But there are perfect winter days as well. Such came at an Eastertide when the farthest skerry of the Hebrides, the dimmest loch and glen on the mainland were visible, and the sea of whitened summits stretched from Sutherland down to Lanark, and away to eastward to peaks which overlook the North Sea. It was a day of sapphire and emerald, of silver rill and ivory snowfield, of purple cloud shadows, of velvety moorlands and ebony crags and cliffs, a day unmatched in colour even in high summer. Underfoot everything was pleasant.

We had come to the ridge of the ben by way of Corrie Leas, 1500 feet of pure, firm snow, with never a stain and scarcely a black rock—from the hidden frozen lochan to the sky-line. The angle was easy, the condition so perfect that all steps were kicked, and not one needed a stroke of the ice-axe. Nor did the cornice offer any difficulty, for the soft lee slope came close to the hard, wind-beaten overhang, and there was scarcely a sign of their misfitting. The cornices on the northern edge of Ben Nevis are famous and at times dreaded. The mountain stands four square to the Atlantic gales, which rip every flake of loose snow up, along and over, to flutter more or less gently into the Mhuillin glen. A great crest of snow is gradually built out from the level ridge, and presents difficulties to parties who have forced the gully or rock towers on the other side. It is from the cornices which overhang the gullies that avalanches chiefly start. Compared with the Alps they are but small and feeble, but they are noisy enough and a cubic yard of hard pressed snow coming down 2000 feet at an angle of 40 degrees smites with tremendous force. I have seen such a fragment strike and burst into dust against rock walls, a lucky finish for a rebound would have swept the hillside clear of one curious spectator. In the Castle Gully of Carn Dearg (the next summit to the topmost Ben Nevis) there was a tremendous roar and I arrived in time to find tons of huge blocks squashed into ice as a narrow part of the cleft. Avalanche adventures of a mild order are not very rare, but mountain folk are loth to speak of the matter. Snowcraft should always warn when slips are likely to take place, and the ignoring of such a warning is rightly deprecated. Sometimes it is decided to risk a little rather than give up a projected ascent.

TWENTY HOURS ON BEN NEVIS

For the mountain adventures of my first winter climb on Ben Nevis I had no responsibility. I merely wandered into Lochaber with a light

ice-axe to help me along frozen and snowy paths. My respect was misinterpreted as a challenge to the Ben and its snowy satellites. Soon I was drawn into a mountain assault which was very much to my taste. Our hostess had prophesied that the morrow would be a good day. In winter, an early start for real work on the Ben is necessary; at daylight we were on the stony path above Achintee farm, and shortly reached the lochan on the shoulder of the mountain. Here winter reigned; there was deep snow above us, ice in the gorges, and cornices on every ridge and crag. Turning left from the lochan we crossed the deer fence, and descended a corridor beneath the rocks into the Mhuillin glen. I am not going to describe our task on the mighty north face of the Ben except to say that it gave me a good lesson in respect.

The gully which had been chosen was floored and walled with snow, and for hours our party kept struggling up, steps being backed most of the way. When we got really high, there was a thunder of avalanche quite close, and the leaders told me that the route we had cut would be obliterated and unsafe for descent. In that case—as in every other—we decided to go on. The head of the gully was closed with a desperate cornice of snow, and there was no chance of hacking a staircase to right or to left. It was decided to attack the overhanging snow at the top of a rock ridge, and to tunnel through the several feet of hard white to the upper plateau of the mountain. Probably we were within a score feet of the upper levels, but the task was immense. In a tunnel of this sort, one man only can work at a time, and the ice-axe is a most ineffective tool when the snow is elastic and declines to be pulled out in blocks. Thus it was that hours passed fast; man after man relieved the axe-man, and gradually the mass was thinning. Then, to make a long story short, a tiny gap appeared at the head of the black tunnel, and this was enlarged so that the party could come up, the leader hauling, perhaps with more humour than necessity, each one up the gap and on to the upper mountain. In my case the haulage was painful; I had waited to the last, and had sent up the rucksacks, and the ice-axes of the others. Perhaps the squad was impatient; they hauled with great vigour, did not give me a chance of working my way clean through the binding snow. At one time I felt as though my body would be cut in two.

I remembered that it was night, black night, on the north face of Ben Nevis—and came up into light with a sense of wonder. The full moon was shining over great expanses of snow; there was not a cloud anywhere; the silver light seemed to make the very world dance. But Nature within us had more to demand than Nature outside; we were wet, cold and hungry, for we had not eaten more than a morsel since the climb was attacked at noon. In the latter hours we had conserved our food, fearing that we might have to send the night out on some rock platform below the final obstacle to our climb.

Yet to cold and hungry men, that moonlit scene was impressive; the lochs in the Cameron country shone like shields of silver; the peaks down

to Glencoe were frozen in a tumult of ivory white turrets, tips, spires, towers, and great snow-waves league after league. There was clear vision up the Great Glen, with a loch cornering here and there among the white ridges; and out to sea were the rounded hills of Mull and perhaps Jura as well. We were bent on getting down soon. The snow on this side of the peak was dry and safe, and we made good speed. Then we dropped into a soft haze and lost the full vivid beauty of the moonlight. Glen Nevis seemed to be filled with thin mist, and as we reached Fort William the upper vision entirely ceased. But it was a wonderful experience of highest Lochaber on a winter night.

At the door of the hotel the Highland hostess was awaiting our return; she had heard the ring of iron-shod boots at a distance, pushed on the preparation of hot drinks, hot baths and hot meals afterwards. Her accuracy as a weather prophet certainly was not impugned. Though it had taken about 20 hours, the "day" on the ben had been superb, and the night was glorious indeed.

ROCK CLIMBS

The rock climbing on the north-facing cliffs of Ben Nevis and Carn Dearg needs consideration. There are courses to suit all degrees of skill and strength, and the grading is easy, moderate, difficult, very difficult, severe, very severe. My own summer ascents have been in the first two categories. The fact that snow hangs practically all the year and ice continues to be met in the deep, gloomy recesses adds an unusual extra problem. About Ben Nevis and Carn Dearg there are towers and pinnacles, ridges and buttresses, great soaring cracks, deep gullies, narrow steep chimneys, of all sorts and sizes. Some give a hundred feet of problem—others like the North East buttress of Ben Nevis go the whole height of 2500 feet of interesting work from start to finish. Nowhere else in Britain, certainly nowhere outside the Coolin in Skye, are there rock-views to compare with those of person of fair physique and steady head may obtain in the Mhuillin glen at the foot of Ben Nevis and Carn Dearg.

Even so the rock aspirant may agree that the Mhuillin glen has plenty of rock, but the slope is usually moderate and the gullies, famous for their winter ice and snow, are scree shoots in summer. On Ben Nevis, No. 4 Gully, above Coire na Ciste, offers little more than a scree walk. No. 3 at the junction of Ben Nevis with Carn Dearg is floored with huge scree blocks. Above this are steep rocks and a wall which is almost a pitch. On Carn Dearg, the North Castle Gully on the north side of the Castle is usually suggested to beginners in mountain craft because the harder parts can be turned. The chief pitch is about 40 feet high, and can be turned on the right wall. Another, a mossy chimney can also be avoided to the right. No. 5 Gully divides the Carn Dearg buttress from the Trident series. Wide, shallow and gentle, in summer it is almost a walk. Most of the year it is snow-buried and gives fair alpine practice. Moonlight Gully, to

the south of No. 5, is a moderate rock climb in summer. These are all simple climbs.

Routes which have moderate technical difficulties are listed as follows: Ben Nevis—Observatory Gully is a huge channel close to the Tower on its eastern side. The gully steepens and narrows until a high rock pitch bars the way. The easy route splits off to the right in easy rocks. No. 3 Gully at the junction with Carn Dearg is steep. Carn Dearg—the following are moderate courses. The Ledge route, marked by a broad band of snow, slopes gently upwards from Coire na Ciste, and reaches the summit of Carn Dearg. In summer it has particularly fine views. The South Castle gully, when free of snow, has a fine first pitch of 40 feet, which leads to a large platform under a waterfall. This obstacle is turned by a very steep, slabby and difficult ascent on the north wall. Above this the only difficult pitch is near the top, and the way lies up some 15 feet of rotten rock, covered with moss. In winter this gully may be a walk, with an easy cornice at the top. The Trident Buttress has its name from three ridges which go to form it, each one terminating in a peak, well seen from the foot of the Tower ridge. The northern one commences up a conspicuous trap dyke in the centre, which is steep but not difficult. The central route lies up a couloir or gully, and later an awkward sloping ledge leads to the left. Rounding a corner, some rocks are negotiated, and a traverse made to the right. The Castle ridge (moderate) has numerous chimneys and pitches to offer sport, but every climber should endeavour to ascend the fine, steep chimney near the edge of the ridge overlooking the valley. The ridge narrows above, but where the most obvious route seems difficult escape is possible. In winter this is a favourite snow climb, and it is possible to turn or avoid difficult places in bad conditions.

RIDGE WALKER'S PARADISE

Climbers' rock is found only on the north face of Ben Nevis and Carn Dearg overlooking the Mhuillin glen. Elsewhere Lochaber is the ridge walker's paradise with breezy narrow aretes and soaring ridges. The "Horseshoe" walk over Carn Dearg, 3961 feet, Ben Nevis 4406 feet, drops to a saddle at 3475 feet on the way to Carn Mor Dearg, 4201 feet, to the east of Ben Nevis and with the most striking and comprehensive view of the northern cliffs. East of this again is the ridge of the Aonachs, reached at the west end by a saddle at about 2700 feet. Here the type of rock and mountain changes, and Aonach Mor, 3999 feet, and Aonach Beag, 4060 feet, have broad, easy and plateau-like tops, more like the Cairngorms than Lochaber. The corrie of Mor facing north has an ample slope which bears snow suitable for ski-running. About 3500 feet, the slope eases off and the last rise is extremely quiet. Aonach Beag has sweeping lines, and its top is flat. The summit is about two miles due east of Ben Nevis, with Mor another mile south by east.

These ridges are increasingly remote from roads and hotels. Still farther away in the diamond-shaped Lochaber are the Grey Corries with

12 "tops" over the 3000 feet level. They stand between Glen Nevis and Glen Spean, and are approached by a sheep-track often difficult to see. This is deer country, and only available in spring with snow as an attraction. The Loch Trieg hills further east with four tops over 3000 feet are in deep and difficult country and apparently without any points of interest.

MAMORE FOREST

South of the river Nevis is Mamore Forest, the clustering peaks of which are seen from Ben Nevis. I once traversed the peaks from Kinlochleven to Fort William, and was content with the result. The main ridge is seven miles long and is mostly above 2750 feet, but with three saddles about 2400 feet. In addition I have paid visits to several peaks in winter. They are mostly of quartzite rock and the typical screes look in some lights like patches of snow. The tops are Binnein Mor, 3700 feet; Beg, 3063 feet and Am Bodach, 3382 feet; Sgurr a Mhaim, 3601 feet; Stob Ban, 3274 feet; Mullach nan Coirean, 3077 feet; and eight more over 3000 feet contour. The glory of this ridge walk is the south front of Ben Nevis, at its biggest and most fascinating, rising 4000 feet from the floor of the glen. In summer this area is largely deer forest. Stob Ban throws down an easy north ridge to Polldhu in Glen Nevis, and has a precipitous north-east face. From Sgurr a Mhaim the best view is obtained—its south ridge is occasionally called the Devil's Ridge; though it is steep it is merely a walk. The fine grass of Mamore Forest makes excellent deer pasture. There are comparatively few grouse, but woodcock, blackgame and others.

GLEN NEVIS: SCOTLAND'S GRANDEST GORGE

Breaking its way through the mightiest bens of Lochaber and reaching Loch Linnhe at Fort William, the River Nevis forms the grandest, most varied and brilliantly coloured gorge in Scotland. The lowest portion, seven miles, is a quiet, beautiful stretch, rising easily with pleasant farms and with oaks and alders beside the water. With every mile the cultivation and trees narrow and the scene becomes more pastoral. Though Ben Nevis rises 4406 feet on the north side, it is masked by outlying buttresses and never visible. At Achriach (or Polldubh) the strath ends with a couple of bridges and a pretty waterfall. The next section is a bold rift zigzagging between Ben Nevis and Sgurr a Mhaim, a quartzite giant of Mamore Forest. The driving road climbs to a corner 450 feet above sea level, with a magnificent view of the twisted watercourse among thorns, yews and scrub, and of the gorge ahead where the River Nevis is always thundering down a ladder of split rocks and water-worn strata, in white and yellow, brown and gold fountains. From this corner the slope to the top of Ben Nevis is the longest and steepest in this country, 4000 feet set at an average angle of over 35 degrees.

The track now splits and the lower path goes close to the cataract and up the roaring, spray-hung gorge. The colour is wonderful at all seasons

of the year. At the head of this section, the path goes forward to Steall, (950 feet), a cottage-farm under the south corner of Aonach Beg, 4060 feet. Usually there is vision of a second and thinner waterfall on the great ben to the south-east of Steall. The path to the east follows the infant Nevis for about four miles, dodging the worst bogs, but soft and heavy walking at best. This path gradually rises to Tom an Eite, a tiny hummock at 1250 feet, which marks the Nevis watershed. The actual springs are about 2500 feet up the south-east face of Binnean More. To the watershed from Fort William is about 14 miles. Beyond it the path follows the Amhainn Rath, reaches Loch Trieg in four miles and Corrou Station in eight miles, making a total distance from Fort William of 22 miles.

(b) HEIGHTS ABOVE GLENCOE

Summer Walks—Aonach Eagach—Buchailles of Etive—Less Difficult Rock Climbs
—Winter Experiences: Bad Snow—Good Snow—Walk from Creagan.

In high summer the district about Glencoe presents a wild chaos of mountains; the tops are crowded round the deep green glen, fenced with cliff-girt corries, scree-strewn slopes, with bare shoulders, faces and ridges of rock. On the south of the glen, Bidean nam Bean, 3766 feet, is the highest peak in Argyllshire, and about it are six other "tops" (like the two on Beinn Fhada) over 3000 feet in height. The outlying ridges below "Munro" level (3000 feet) are, however, much more exhilarating. The actual summit of Bidean nam Bean, though so prominent from the Mamore Forest peaks and from Ben Cruachan, can be seen from one point only in the Coe valley, near Clachaig. The three very striking "Sisters" of Glencoe—Faith, Hope and Charity—as seen from the study (1011 feet) are Aonach Dubh, 2849 feet, with Ossian's Cave, a black slit in its split and furrowed rock face; Beinn Fhada, 2666 feet, and Gear Aonach, 2500 feet. These are really minor buttresses of the massive Bidean nam Bean. Parts of the Sisters are steep, others seem to overhang, and old writers on travel found the passage sensational and even menacing. Prominent in the same famous view is that grand and rugged rock peak, Stob Coire nan Lachan.

Ossian's Cave is merely an illusion; there is no cave, but a floor rising at an angle of 45 degrees. Even a poet could not live or even sleep there. Nichol Marquis, a Glencoe shepherd, is supposed to have made the first ascent in 1868 up very steep rock and grass. The modern rock expert has some respect for the problem, and talk learnedly of a great waterfall gully and of Ossian's Ladder, a 100 feet of slippery moss, lichens, slime, mud and rock set at an almost impossible steepness. W. Cecil Slingsby, the famous Yorkshire conqueror of Norway's arctic peaks, climbed here in 1897. By 1930 49 cards had been placed in the metal box at the back of the cave. Ossian's visitors were select and few.

Most of the Glencoe ridges are narrow and the buttresses are rough and steep, but the going can be fair walking and not scrambling if proper paths are chosen. Another character is the number of *beallachs* or saddles when there is time and strength to pick and choose. The colossal buttresses plunging down to the bottom of Glencoe, which give such incomparable grandeur to the view from "The Study", are so shaped that the western face is tame and uninteresting.

The best ridge walk extends from An t-Sron (the Nose, 2750 feet), by a path which climbs from the new road near Clachaig, over Stob Coire nam Beath, 3621 feet, to Bidean nam Bean, 3766 feet. Between this and Stob Coire Sgreamhach, 3497 feet, is a dip, and then the ridge turns north-east to Beinn Fhada, which has two tops over 3000 feet. The best descent is by the corrie Gabhail, where the grassy floor is more bouldery than any other part of Glencoe. Bidean nam Bean can also be climbed from this corrie by the steep screes at its head. The usual line from Clachaig to the summit aims for the saddle between Bidean and Stob Coire nan Lochan, and the upper part is a steep and narrow ridge. From Dalness in Glen Etive there is a tedious approach by the long Fhaolain valley. The view from the summit northward includes the gapped Aonach Eagach edge on the north side of Glencoe, with the Mamore Forest peaks beyond Loch Leven, and the Lochaber trio of 4000 feet peaks—Ben Nevis, Carn Mor Dearg and Aonach Beag. Ben Cruachan is prominent to the south, with to the west many Atlantic sea-lochs and the peaks in Ardgour and Ben More of Mull.

AONACH EAGACH

On the north side of the deep green Glencoe and with the sea-loch Leven beyond, the Aonach Eagach or Notched Ridge has four points above 3000 feet. Part of the six-mile ridge from the Devil's Staircase on Wade's disused road to Kinlochleven to the Pap of Glencoe may be used to approach and to follow, but steep screes are a pest. This applies to both ends whether the traverse is taken eastward or westward—the latter is preferable, ending at the Pap of Glencoe. Many parts are exposed, narrow and with precipitous drops on both sides. Sgorr nam Fiannaidh, 3168 feet, is the highest, one and a half miles to the north-north-east of Clachaig, with a near rival in height of Meall Dearg, 3118 feet. Am Bodach is 3084 feet and Stob Coire 3080 feet. The centre part is rightly claimed to be the narrowest and most difficult of all mainland ridges. Compared with it, the Crib Goch ridge curving round to Snowdon in North Wales is less broken, never narrow and its towers—even including the Crazy Pinnacle—are much less alarming than this, while Striding Edge in the Lake District of England is safe and easy. The sector about Meall Dearg requires particular care, and a party with a rope is much safer. The place has been used for schooling Alpine aspirants in the use of the rope in quick combined progress over easy rocks. Arran and Skye

among the Scottish isles in the first case has an equal ; the other's splintered ridges are more difficult.

BUCHAILLES OF ETIVE

At the head of Glencoe, the Coe comes in from the north where its source, near Stob Mhic Mhartuin, is not far from the Devil's Staircase which was the ancient way from Rannoch to Fort William. The last stream from the opposite side is the Eilde, with Beinn Fhada to the west and the high smooth range of Buchaille Etive Beag, 3130 feet to the east. The other slope drains into the River Coupal, which flows by Altnafeadh to the Etive. The top of Beag can be reached from the pass road and traversed to Glen Etive without any difficulty, on a clear day. It is not a rock peak. Seen from Loch Etive and certain parts of the Dalness road, it presents a neat cone of hill between the Larig Eilde, 1400 feet, and Larig Gartain, 1600 feet. The Larig Gartain divides Beg from its practically parallel and higher "Shepherd" (Mor, 3345 feet). The key of the mountain, whether for the rock climber or ridge walker, is the footbridge across the River Coupa lat Altnafeadh, a keeper's cottage on the road from Glencoe to Kingshouse. The point aimed at is Coire na Tulaich. Stob Dearg, the highest part of Buchaille Etive, can be reached from this direction without difficult climbing, and this applies to every point on either the Mor or Beag ridges. Broken boulders and scree may have to be tackled, but nothing worse. The greatest view of the peak is from the Moor of Rannoch ; near Kingshouse, where in Principal Shairp's words :

Buchaille Etive's furrowed visage
To Shichallion looked sublime,
O'er a wide and wasted desert,
Old and unreclaimed as time.

LESS DIFFICULT ROCK CLIMBS

In the heights above Glencoe the best rock climbing is found on Buchaille Etive Mor, the pyramid of rock which, rising to 3345 feet, stands out sheer and bold in every glimpse westward across Rannoch Moor. The crag (known locally as Stob Dearg—the red peak) seems to be impossible from the Kingshouse road, but there are some easy and moderate as well as difficult courses upon it. These include C Gully (east of the Crowberry Ridge), Curved Ridge, Collie's Climb, North Gully and North Traverse as well as the progressive North Wall Climb, D Gully Buttress, Crowberry Traverse, Lady's Gully, and Central Buttress.

C Gully is an easy course between the Crowberry Ridge and the Curved Ridge, and its pitches may be turned by way of the Curved Ridge (in descent). The Curved Ridge is long and well defined, starting at the 2100 feet contour and rising to 3000 feet. Collie's Climb makes practically a straight line up the Central Buttress from Kingshouse to the highest

point. The North Gully and North Ridge are on the North buttress which is divided into three great steps. The rocks are rough and reliable, and the worst problems can be avoided. Of the moderate courses, D Gully Buttress has six small pitches in the lower part, and a difficulty near the top can be turned on the right. This climb is rarely quite free of snow. The Central Buttress, about 800 feet of steep rock, has a formidable lower bastion which is turned by rocks on the north side, and the easy climb starts from the Heather Ledge. The Lady's Gully in the east face begins with a long narrow chimney dominated by some chockstones. However, a shallow cave is found beneath the capstone, and progress is made from it to the left; after this the gully widens out. The Crowberry Traverse starts on the right of the "Chasm" on the east face, and slants up and across to the tower at the top of the Crowberry Ridge. The rocks are broken up, and most parties make their own routes.

Buchaille Etive has also some magnificent rock climbs both in length and severity. The Crowberry Ridge, which is seen from the Kingshouse road, is a severe climb of at least 600 feet from its rise to a projecting tower almost within a stone's-throw of the top. Its course is very distinctly defined and is no place for the novice. The "Chasm is probably the longest and most difficult gully climb in the country, its only possible rival being the Waterpipe Gully in Skye" is the verdict of a great rock-climbing manual. "It starts at a height of 1150 feet and finishes on the upper slopes of the mountain at a height of 2700 feet." There are at least 16 important pitches on this gully climb, with few places for escape of a benighted party. At the Devil's Cauldron, 175 feet high, the 15th pitch, the waterfall has to be climbed—no small task.

In the mountain wall around Glencoe are many rock towers and buttresses, which provide problems for expert parties. The rocks are very steep and slabby, and do not give pleasant climbing. The Ossian Cave's Face of Aonach Dubh has rock climbs of the more difficult order. The same applies to Bidean nam Bean, where the Church Door Buttress and its neighbour the Diamond Buttress provide gruelling problems for experts. The same applies to the corries leading up to Stob Coire nam Lochan. Stob Coire nam Beith has a tower of dark rock which gives buttress and gully climbs.

TRAMPING TO GLENCOE

My first journey to the peaks about Glencoe involved a mighty long tramp. I planned to leave Tyndrum station after the evening train, and to follow the old military (now mostly disused) road to the Bridge of Orchy. From that railway station the only track to Kingshouse passed to the west of Loch Tulla with its pines whispering and scenting the breeze. Then due north across the Black Mount deer forest to Kingshouse inn, and then west by Wade's road to Altafeadh cottage, where the military road climbs north by the Devil's Staircase for Kinlochleven and Fort William. I kept west to the "Study" and dropped down the track to Glencoe. It was a

rather impressive bit, but the editor to whom I had suggested the topic never printed my description. Perhaps he did not quite believe it.

The old soldier's stage from Tyndrum to Kingshouse inn was 18 miles with another 12 at most to the clachan at Glencoe, where I breakfasted at a quiet cottage. Here the other person asked me whether as I passed Kingshouse inn in the night, I had noticed any signs of occupation. I thought so, and he was relieved. Apparently some years before the house had been untenanted for some time, with broken doors and windows and bare rooms.

I was fresh enough to stroll round the tragic village and to make an ascent of the easy and simple Pap of Glencoe, for its fine outlook before making across the glen to examine the approach to Ossian's Cave, and to the buttress of Bidean nam Bian, which was to be climbed on the morrow.

In a book on the Highlands published in 1860, before railways approached the west coast of Scotland, Mr. Charles Robert Weld describes a late-season coach-trip from Banavie to Loch Lomond *via* Glencoe:

"It was the huge van-like coach's last journey for the season, and a strange journey it was. For at every place between Banavie and Loch Lomond where we stopped, we took up various articles belonging to the coach establishment: brushes and buckets, horse-cloths and harness, with an enormous quantity of whisky contained in living barrels, said barrels being the ostlers. The fact is, the coach was returning to its winter quarters to be laid up in ordinary until the ensuing season; and as no passengers were expected, everybody considered he had full licence to get drunk.

"How the coach got through Glencoe is a mystery to me. I walked and arrived at King's House long before the coach reeled up to that lonely abode. Here more ostlers full of whisky were taken up, with the result, of course, of increasing the drunken confusion of everybody; and so we galloped down that long hill across the shoulder of the Black Mount, and through Lord Breadalbane's forest, to Tyndrum, scattering, to the dismay of their shepherds, thousands of sheep that were being driven to Falkirk Cattle Tryst, and which whitened the road for many miles. That the coach, with its motley and tremendous load, arrived whole at Tyndrum is highly creditable to its builder, for so erratic were its motions that I momentarily expected to find myself sprawling on the road, and see the vehicle break up into innumerable fragments."

WINTER EXPERIENCES

Discretion is needed in winter scrambling about Glencoe, especially if one's sole companion is an ice-axe. The district may be on a less massive scale than Ben Nevis, but there is no rockier place in the mainland of Scotland. Everywhere wild summits are riven, twisted, distorted, and crowded into a small area. Ice and snow add their advantages and difficulties. New snow or cold, the bens have a splendid majesty in

winter. Here in Glencoe, in early December, the snow lies in patches at the 600 feet contour; at 1000 feet it is in white fields, fields from which rise great dark towers and spires, masses and slabs of rock. What the conditions will be at 2500 feet, say the average height of the ridges, can only be generalised. Even a partial view of the highest bens is impossible.

My personal experience is that the mountains above Glencoe are more open to weather changes, to frost and snow, thaw and mist, and gale than any others. I have gone to bed at Clachaig to the sound of rain among the pines and wakened to a world gripped white in frost and snow. The toughest day above Glencoe was a fairly determined effort to storm the corrie beneath Stob Coire nan Lochan. Everything was masked in ice after several days of torrential rain and eighteen hours of clear frost, and the axe was at work early. The slope of An t'Sron which is usually an easy walk needed care at many places, and I only persevered in the hope that on the higher hill snow might take the place of frozen rain. I cannot remember that the work was tedious: probably it was done with enthusiasm worthy of more promising material. Progress was so slow that at a quarter to two the top of the slope was still high above. To fight this to a finish meant either a night out, or a perilous glissade in the twilight down the less rocky western slope of Bidean. Above Glencoe the western slopes mercifully turn an easier cheek to the wanderer. In less discreet days the risk would certainly have been taken. I admit to a feeling of self-contempt as I turned down the hardly-won ladder of steps, zigzagging here and there among the rocks, but really there was no sense in pushing on. And indeed the descent had to be compassed with so much care and steadiness that the hillsides were in deep shadow before the fields at Loch Achtriochan were reached. I was told at the hotel that the weather had been brighter.

So next morning the Aonach Eagach or Notched Ridge on the north side of the glen was looked at. It is narrow, rugged, and as full of gaps as a saw. Here and there the rocks overhang, and even in summer it would need bold and skilful hands to pass along from end to end of the ridge. I have a personal liking for this ridge, maybe because opportunity has never come to conquer the whole distance. The rock scenery is very fine, and there is a tiny corrie of entrancing beauty looped in the ridge which I dropped into under snow conditions and had to leave alone.

BAD SNOW

New snow on a long grassy ridge is an abomination; on rocks it entirely defeats the climber. Certainly it can be cleared from the long ledges, but a forty minutes' easy course may string out into a long day's work—and winter days are terribly short on the hills above Glencoe. The last gloom of night lingers in the cloud realm until within three hours of noon, and by 3 p.m. all haste may have to be made to the glen before darkness, in more or less Biblical phrase, "falleth like a mantle". You feel far from comfortable groping down a trackless slope between spits of snow and grass which

looks like rock, and grey rock-slabs which only disclose their true nature when the boot-nails clink and scrape on their surface.

New snow is at the beck and call of every breeze—unstable, it is whirled hither and thither in masses, forming drifts and cornices, hiding springs and burns, plastering thick on this buttress, rolling in smoky wreaths from the exposed rocks and peaks and ridges. A smart breeze tears tons of snow from the exposed slopes, and spreads them into the deep rocky clefts. Though new snow on the mountains may be a trouble, it is rarely a danger compared with its fiendish behaviour on top of an older deposit. Nearly all the exciting winter incidents of Scottish mountain-ering have come from this source.

GOOD SNOW

Good snow, from the climber's point of view, commands the highest efforts of Nature's artistry. Rain and frost and wind, and Father Time must be brought to bear. The lower slopes must be soft enough for steps to be kicked deep and safe; and higher up, in the corridor between the great cliffs above Glencoe, the ice-axe is expected to get full play. Not, however, to the extent one has sometimes found on slopes which have been very wet, and are now frozen solid. Eight heavy strokes of the axe is terrific task for every step, and if the enthusiastic leader does not object, the others, waiting below, chilled to the bone and without any share in the occupation certainly do. Just hard enough to hold steps at its steepest angle, just soft enough to present no heavy labour, is the ideal for climbers' snow.

Sometimes the surface is iced after thaw and sudden frost, and then there is trouble enough. The ridge-walker may find no difficulty at first, crossing the wide fields with the nailed Alpine boots and ice-axe spike, but when the angle steepens he is hard put to it. There is a certain ben of grass, a cone smooth and steep, which is apt to prove a tough customer under these conditions, and to justify the maxim of a rope to every party on winter travel. In good snow the gullies give splendid sport. In firm, sound stuff, the progress goes on steadily; look up; and there is the rock-tower which marks a stage from Glencoe; then slash, slash, clink; the leader steadies himself and progresses a step, his second belaying carefully, then in his turn stepping forward. All eyes are on the immediate rock slope, and one is surprised 20 minutes later that the pinnacle has vanished. Its fine contours have melted into the parent buttress below us.

Good snow and cornices "go" together. Under any other conditions that tiny wave of white over a line of shadow must be avoided. In firm conditions the climber starts out with the intention of overcoming the cornice as an acceptable way of escape from the great corrie. A straight line may be made, for this is no day of crumbling and of thaw, and the upper snow is firmly anchored. Now and again a fine type of verglas—a thin skin of ice on sloping rocks—is met with. The writer admits a pleasure in shirking this truly Alpine obstacle which needs a delicate touch in

working the ice-axe. The crack away too much of the ice-plate is as dangerous as too little. There are places in plenty on our bens where a step or two must be cut in thin ice, just as now and again a party clambers up by steps in some vast icicle or frozen waterfall. These are tests of the true Alpine craft. But what a melody the ice-axe calls forth as the party clears the fringe of frozen droppers under some cave pitch!

There is another and insidious pleasure about snow in perfect condition which has now and again wrecked the most careful climbing programme: I refer to the glissade either standing or, when the hillside is moist, in a sitting position. When the snow slope is in good order, you grasp the ice-axe, step over the tiny bergschrund, and away. The cold air seems to hiss in one's ears, the brake is wondrously flexible, and it seems but a breathless moment before you are standing on the ice-dome covering the tiny lochan in the scree-basin. Anything short of good snow or perfect knowledge of the mountain slope makes glissading dangerous—and an involuntary glissade is usually a terror. Without an ice-axe to control the pace, the glissade is unjustifiable on high peaks; it must partake of the ragamuffin's game of gliding down the front of an ash-tip.

An ice-axe, properly held, is a safeguard when on strange snow, but nothing can justify a glissade when the climber is actually uncertain as to even which slope of the mountain he is on. A glissading slope is none the worse for being a trifle steep, but some effort should be made to judge both its angle and extent. A sitting glissade, by presenting a larger surface of pressure, is possible in moderately soft snow, but it has to be remembered that the larger surface is not leather-bound to meet the exceptional friction. In one of the Highland sporting classics is the story of a fox-hunter who laid his plaid on the steep snow, and, after a downward rush at express speed, he endeavoured in vain to retrieve a thread of that covering. It had led the way to limbo for sundry missing portions of my raiment.

WALK FROM CREAGAN

For the following unconventional pass into Glencoe I was not responsible. At Creagan station it was decided to make a "straight line" over the hills to Glencoe, and four men with nailed boots and a climbing rope followed the road alongside the sea-loch Creran and up Glen Creran by lane and cart-track. It wasn't a bad night, and after a couple of hours I suggested, beside a small loch, that we should continue north, where the sky was clearer, crossing a brook or two to Ballachulish. "I'm aiming for Clachaig; to go round by the quarry village—we might as well have stopped in the train." We turned north-east, facing the thickening night-cap in that direction, for Clachaig had a great reputation among mountain folk.

For a mile or two there was sufficient indication of the way; and then mist crept down from Bidean nam Bian and made the place confusing. We came to a noisy brook cutting among rocks. "Somewhere near here

is a bridge," but no signs were visible. The air thickened. Then it was decided that some one should ford the deepening flood, and look along the other side. The water was now deep and so the man who had elected to go to Clachaig was tied to the rope, and told to cross. He wandered about the other bank for about ten minutes, then came back to the ford and indicated that the rest should cross. I was the first, and when I was well into the depth I noticed, outlined against the sky, about 50 yards down, the bridge of our desire. Ignoring my protests the leader then called for the next man to cross on the double line. He, too, saw the outline, and the three of us called for the other to come along. "If one of us got wet, the others shouldn't escape."

(c) BEN CRUACHAN

Night Bivouac—Spider Queen—In Winter.

From the first time I saw Cruachan's mighty bulk coiled like a sleeping hound at the head of Loch Awe, I wished to walk over its summits. But years came and went; other bens were assailed in sunshine, snow and rain, and Cruachan remained unvisited. Next to Ben Nevis, Ben Lomond, and Lochnagar, it is probably the most climbed of Scottish peaks. It is certainly conspicuous, and its twin summits are far more often in sight than the top of Ben Nevis which is 500 feet higher. The railway, skirting its base, makes the mountain well known and easily accessible. Besides which, does there not sleep at its foot the lovely and romantic Loch Awe? From Dalmally, from Loch Awe, from Taynuilt stations, and from the bus route through the Pass of Brander, easily marked courses take one to the summit. There is also a signal stopping place at the Falls of Cruachan which otherwise cuts three miles off the shortest railway route, and makes it equal to the motor way. Fate at last ordained an afternoon train to Loch Awe, and a saunter by the road through the pass, a glorious walk with the waves sparkling on the lake and anon bright flashes through the trees marking the waterfalls.

My map shows that in the first five furlongs from the Loch Awe road there is a rise of a 1000 feet—a gradient averaging one in three and a half, a track dodging in and out of fern or bracken tangles, across tracts of bog and boulders, and even for a few yards at a time on the naked rock. With a rucksack packed with extra clothing and food for the night, this made heavy going, and I was relieved when the rough little shepherd's bridge marked the top of the ravine, the threshold of the Cruachan corrie. Loch Awe was finely in view for a while, and especially the long narrow arm which runs down the Pass of Brander. Coire Cruachan is a peaty level, girt round with rock-strewn slopes, of the excellence which is commonplace in the Scottish wilds. Seen in gloom of evening, it had a stern beauty. And now began the second stage of the ascent.

Glencoe and Bidean Nam Bien across Loch Leven

[Photo by Robert Adam]





This rises from the corrie at say 1200 feet to the narrow saddle, at 2700 feet, between Meall Cuanail and Cruachan itself. The angle was steep, but not nearly so severe as the lower slope already mentioned. The light was failing, the night-cap of cloud was lowering until at times even the saddle ahead was invisible. Somewhere near 9 p.m. I came suddenly upon the rickety iron railing which serves to prevent cattle and sheep trespassing on grazings beyond the ridge on either side. At this point Ben Cruachan presents a formidable cliff, but tucked away beyond the edge is a broad gully paved with broken rock, an easy ladder to the steep shoulder of mountain above. From this point forward the mist was continuous; a snag of rock would loom above, in fifteen paces be underfoot, and in another fifteen be invisible in the gloom beneath. And so I plodded on and on, now and again striking a patch of grass or pulverised granite, but mainly moving along a *pavé* of loose fragments.

From the summit (3689 feet) there was, of course, no view, and so I scouted for a bivouac until dawn. And from westerly winds Nature has formed a pretty shelter, though improvable by a rucksack against a very definite gap between two splinters. My first thought was to get into night equipment—gloves, balaclava, sweater, waistcoat and raincoat. I scarcely felt the need of puttees, so these were left in the rucksack. And, next, food—the night bivouac is much less depressing when appetite is either tempted or forced every three hours or so. Again and again I changed position, raised on elbow to see whether the mist was clearing, lowered again. The cloud above was quite thin, and regularly I saw a few stars—once a corner of the Great Bear, and again the belt of Orion, and once a planet like a yellow candle flame appeared in the north east. But for the most part the view was nothing but the little rock platform, over which the night wind was sweeping, and a vast dimness of cloud on either side.

At midnight the stars were visible for quite a while; there was sight, too, of the pale north sky where the nightglow waxed and waned in cold primrose, and there was a sudden glare behind the clouds to south-east—the moonrise was hours old to the observers in the glens. Yes, the mist was clearing. There was a shifting of grey and a terribly sharp ridge leapt into sight to the west—part of the Taynuilt peak (Stob Dearg, 3611 feet) of Ben Cruachan, a steep, dizzy tightrope of rock, with a spray of shattered cloud boiling beneath it. And in the grey mists appeared white patches, then all the grey blots fell away, and over a darkened wilderness I looked to a still darker sword of water—Loch Etive, visible from the foot of Glen Noe to its head. It was a solemn sight, a world at rest, a world awaiting the coming of dawn, an abode of silence, peace. The clouds kept hurling themselves at the cliff of Cruachan and floating overhead in soft spray, but again and again the marvellous view appeared below. The hills were all capped with drifted white, and clouds seemed to creep and wander over distant uplands, but away to the north still pulsed the cold nightglow of the northland.

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Morning mists on Ben Cruachan

Photo by W. Thomson]

Then like a wall came a new army of grey, and in a minute Cruachan was overwhelmed. I lay down to rest and to fix in the mind that glimpse of a sleeping wilderness. And again came a thinning, some part of the view, but never a glimpse beyond the north-west quarter, though I wished much for a peep at the ridge going eastward, and at Loch Awe, which lies to the southward. There was a saw edge of famous mountains too—Ben Nevis and Buchaille Etive in particular, but most desired was the ridge going to the eastward.

The time passed fairly comfortably, though now and again a sputter of chill rain threatened a wetting. At 4 a.m. the light was so much improved that one felt "somewhere the sun is shining". And ten minutes later the north-west was again opened out. And what a transformation! The rose of dawn was on the misty heads of the mountains; there was broad daylight in the upper sky, yet the glens, Loch Etive, were in shadow—belts of purple gloom the deep sunk land, and a sword of ebony that arm of the sea. The mist-clouds were moving, moving; here a giant wave of ivory gliding on through resistless space, there a spray, a veil, a tracery of delicate fineness, curling, moving, forward ever, and here again huge towers of cloud planted on mighty fleeces of tender white, their flimsiness, their unreality accentuated by contrast with the darkened land beneath. A sight never to be forgotten!

Then just as the rose of the upper clouds began to change to gold, a sharp puff of wind, a dampness of mist particles in the air, and the clouds once more claimed the summit of Ben Cruachan, claimed it with a grip impalpable but unrelenting.

Now that walking was possible in the new light, I scrambled down the rough slope, and along the stony ridge to the western cairn, a journey which, with the return, took about an hour's time, and seemed quite purposeless, for the character of the view—rocks and mist—never changed. It was time to abandon the uplands, so picking up the rucksack I faced east, where the bens gradually lower toward Dalmally. But three or four steep descents, some unsatisfactory climbs, and a scramble over some great slabs made me question whether it was worth while crossing hill after hill with never a glimpse of the world above or below. So down the southern slope I turned, left the realm of the mist, and in half an hour traced the Cruachan burn down to its rocky channel into the corrie. Down here the day was bright and even warm, so at a fine rock-pool above the falls I had my morning's bath, and changed into attire more suited to the glens.

SPIDER QUEEN

There are spiders, no doubt knights and barons of ancient degree, in the crannies of ruined towers by gloomy Loch Awe. There are spiders, industrious clansmen these, in the narrow trod between great beds of bracken which clambers up the frowning steeps of Brander. There are clever weavers of orbs and curtains in the brakes by the stony shore, and

thrifty crofters who twine long cables of gossamer between the tufts of meadowsweet on the islands. Spiders, spiders, everywhere. Dainty filaments wave from unseen bases among the crimson heather of the high corrie. The airways between and about the granite boulders by the burn are entangled with well woven nets and booms. There are spiders, veritable Rob Roys, roving in the sunshine, seeking what they may devour of winged things, and spiders, like assassins, which post themselves in the fastnesses of shade.

But queen of all, queen above all, is the spider which occupies the highest spike of Cruachan Ben, high 3700 feet above the sea.

A queen she is, and yet a recluse, a solitary monarch for not one of her kind was in attendance during the long hours spent in her misty, wind-swept palace among the rocks. A queen without retinue! Yes. Queen Elizabeth, the Empress Catharine, was not so dangerous to her friends as the spider potentate enthroned on Ben Cruachan. Mountain appetites are keen, and the favourite food of a queen spider seems to be suitors, accepted or rejected.

The shades of night were rapidly closing in as I reached the summit. It was a mere cluster of rocks, illuminated by that peculiar bluish glow which to mountaineers always betokens abysses around, and the clear air of God's heaven above. Great billows of mist were bursting round the rocky pile, and now and again heavy drops of rain splashed down. One might be pardoned for not noticing at first that this was a palace—roofless, wall-less even in a sense, but a rucksack jammed between two fragments made a necessary wind break. Behind this I lay, partly on granite sand, partly on stones, with body curled to avoid this or that fragment. There was, at any rate, shelter, though there was no luxury.

It was the sweater, produced with gloves and balaclava from the rucksack, which attracted her majesty's attention. As it lay for a moment on the sloping fragment she ran daintily into sight, demonstrated with two of her long legs uplifted—a nebula of grey patched with white and an array of black brown legs. No doubt her eyes were handsome, but that detail escaped my attention. She was as business-like as a royal personage inspecting a model laundry, and made a complete traverse of the creamy-white garment. Then she scurried on to the dark granite, and I saw her again with one of the royal pedes erect in air commanding my attention from a gritty corner. Here was a royal mandate to spend the hours at any rate to dawn. This received, extra garments were donned, and I lay down to make the best of the palace. A few minutes later, her majesty was outlined between my eyes and the surging mist as she made a final tour of her kingdom. A weird monarch indeed, a dot on the bridge of dashes moving industriously on the edge of the stone. How does her majesty dine and sup on these days of mist and gloom when neither fly nor ant nor other winged creature can invade her royal domain? Perhaps her activity at so late an hour was connected with a desire for food: a casual suitor of manageable size would not come amiss.

Though cramped and twisty, my apartment in the palace was not uncomfortable. True it was open to the sky, but though the night was misty the rain kept off. There was moisture on the rocks and the wind blew strongly at times, but the rucksack was an efficient barricade and one lay in comparative calm. My windows commanded a good outlook—upward to where every now and again a corner of Charles's Wain or the Belt of Orion gleamed through the thinning mists, or out to where the evening star hung its tiny lamp. There was a downward view, obtained by rising on one elbow: a buckle of the rucksack, a sharp fragment of rock to right and to left, and a dismal cauldron beyond in which the mists of night seemed to be boiling.

Whether her majesty's tour extended into the dark hours one cannot say: she was invisible to me, and let us hope employed in rest. Certainly with her diminutive size and adhesive limbs she would be in less danger than a mere human wandering among these crags. There is some advantage in being equipped as a monarch of these wilds.

About midnight a flurry of bright mist billows proclaimed the coming of the full moon, and after a while the queen of the night sailed into full view. But the spray of vapour was ever bursting round my rocky platform, and soon darkness conquered light, though the stone-built cairn remained clearly visible in the brightened air.

"The dark hour of the morning watch" brought an improvement of weather conditions to the rock-girt kingdom, and for the first time I was shown that the universe was more than a walpurgis of mist, a stack of stones, a pale moon and a shaking of feeble stars. A grey ghost of a ridge covered with wet rocks sheered out of the whirling grey, and then a shifting, a curling, and confusion, chaos, once more. But the breeze moved more and more swiftly, and one by one burst the vapoury bonds on this side the mountain. Over my sheltering rucksack, I looked out and down, down, down, to a tremendous depth in which a torrent was raging white, in which there were wet rocks, and a glen shelving farther and farther until a line of white showed the sea-loch chafing against the land.

This glimpse encouraged me to a survey of Ben Cruachan's summit, but in no direction was there more than ladderish descents over broken stones. An hour later there was another brightening of the air, a shifting of the cloud bonds. And again the view down deep Glen Noe to Loch Etive—and up Loch Etive to its very head where the glen slopes up many a mile to the weary Moor of Rannoch.

But tonight, from the palace of the spider-queen, there was more hidden than seen. Feathers of mist drifted on lower streams of air, kissing, hugging, creeping over the little hills beneath, twisting into the narrow defiles, jumping over the cols between rock-crested ridges. More and more clearly I saw Loch Etive's dark plain, its white surfs lining reef and shore, every bay, every cape, but never for a moment did the cloud feathers cease to float in from the west, from the Hebrides, from the great, wide Atlantic.

And so till dawn when the vapour clung still closer to the cold walls of mountain, to sunrise proclaimed by a faint pinkness above and a brighter light around. Again the north-west quarter of the compass cleared, again that view down to Loch Etive, across to the hills of Appin, away toward Glencoe—a warmer, liver view this time. The loch, no longer a shield of ebony, flushed to rose and its quiet mid waters flashed silver where the tide danced and glanced against rock and strand.

Then again the clouds closed down, this time to the accompaniment of a slow drizzle. Not enough to drench, but enough allied to a night of mist to make movement desirable. To the far end of the ridge I walked carefully over ruins of stone, wide enough to be the foundations of a destroyed Tower of Babel, to the cairn over Taynuilt which is famous for its view out to the Hebrides and over Loch Linnhe. This morning a circle of fifteen yards was all that could be seen.

Then back again to the central summit to retrieve the rucksack and to take leave of the spider-queen. But 5 a.m. is an unofficial hour indeed—she was not visible. So down the ladder of rocks facing eastward for the long ridge which leads toward Dalmally and the level strath of Orchy.

Today, I think, the queen spider's table will be better furnished than yesterday. The mists have blown aside, and I remember the squadrons of flies and midges which under such conditions chase any casual wanderer on the mountain sides. Biting, buzzing, stinging, they invade with the climber the home of the spider-queen, and for a while her hunting must be strenuous. Every snag of rock seems hung with flies large and small; they buzz, they sing, they whistle, they sink down to shelter when the breeze blows, and are massacred. Really we must thank the spider-queen for something, if only for a sincere effort to rid these ridge walks of the myriad flies and midges.

IN WINTER

My finest vision of Ben Cruachan was on a day of late December from the launch up Loch Etive. The frost-fog swayed quietly from the waters, burst into tatters, and there, soaring over our heads, its snows bathed in golden sunshine, Cruachan seemed to reach up to, even to shoulder its way within the magnificent purple-blue sky. Then the fog-cloud dropped back, stirred a little, and there was a spectral outline of a tower of cold silver through the veil. Twice were we shown this dissolving, interchanging view, and then the fog cleared. There was an end to witchery, to reticence, to romance: Cruachan, firm-footed in sea-green of loch and red of dead bracken, stood dour, grim, defiant, a mighty soldier among mountains. Cruachan is a range rather than a single peak. Along its curving ridges there are at least seven distinct points over 3000 feet in height. Though its base covers 20 square miles of ground, Cruachan has not the cumbrous flanks of Ben Nevis. Nor is it so sheer and narrow as the heights above Glencoe. Alas! that it should have no great face of rock to attract the expert climber, no northerly gullies where its snows can mature to the

satisfaction of the man with the ice-axe and alpine rope. Nor can the range offer the high levels and broad, open corries which in February attract the ski-runner. I must, however, protest against any feeling that Cruachan is an amiable Father Christmas of a mountain: he can certainly give the novice in search of adventure a lively time indeed.

Summer and winter alike Cruachan seems easy to walk. The railway and great motor-road cut across its southern base. Advance seems easy at most points, but retreat is sometimes quite another matter. One who tarries on the peak until the gloom gathers may miss the proper opening to the glen, and spend a good deal of time on treacherous rocks and wearisome grass slopes before he blunders into a safe path. On the map it seems impossible to miss the way to Cruachan burn, but more than one belated party has found itself entangled in strange slopes and forced west until they reached the Bridge of Awe, eight long, dark and hungry miles from their quarters.

And when struggling among the rocks of the lower mountain it is humorous to recall that on one occasion a whole army, finding its enemy posted in the Pass of Brander, climbed along these hills in darkness to deliver a surprise attack. Here in 1308 King Robert the Bruce won a great personal victory over the men of Argyll, under the command of John, fifth chief and Lord of Lorn.

The snows of Ben Cruachan seem always in bad humour when my visit is due. They are petulant, tearful drifts, and the lash of rain has not ceased to play about them. The progress is by knee-deep wading, varied by plunges into bog and mire, and now and again a black skin of ice has to be cleared from some slab or rock ladder. And to crown the misery of it all, the view in front, around, is about the length of an ice-axe. Perhaps one is a Jonah, a bringer of ill-luck, in regard to this ben, for parties who have met the upper snows in uniformly good condition, have only to accept my presence to find the great corrie a pasty, soaking mass, the ridges a slippery, sliding ladder, and the air choked with rain and cloud. The man is envied who finds Cruachan at its best in winter, the snow firm and dry, the icicles with scarcely a drip, the rock-faces and boulders clean and sharp-cut, and that wonderful panorama of sea, island, loch, glen and mountain visible to its farthest edge.

After all, there is a real zest about climbing under bad conditions. We know that any and every change must be for the better, any and every surprise towards the delightful. At such times, route-finding becomes a real test, the compass must be used. It is easy to potter into difficulties, to come up against an unexpected cliff or precipice, and to spend two or three hours trying, first to find the correct route upward or around, and second, the way off the mountain before complete darkness shuts us in! A snow-drift is a mighty poor bivouac—I write from personal experience—for anyone less hardy than a ptarmigan or a mountain fox. Those guides, the burns, are not to be depended on in winter, for sometimes they travel half a mile unseen beneath deep drifts of snow. Every step the wanderer is

troubled by the fear that something may cave in and give him a most unwelcome descent. Quite often parties report that after an hour on this puzzling wilderness they come back to the point where they started. If that happens after three on a winter afternoon the return to quarters may be sadly delayed.

When the snow is really deep and in order, the forcing of the whole ridge makes a delectable day's work. Nowhere is the work necessarily severe, and the short steep traverses of rocky peaks come after long stretches on easy snow. Some patches on the mountain, such as the stony half-mile between the Dalmally and Taynuilt tops, go easier when thick snow has masked the boulders.

The Cruachan country is particularly glorious. Think of Loch Awe, with a white ice-belt round the shore, the islands, and river entrances, the waters grey with melted snow, and the great peak hanging over it in the clear moonlight. Then the ruined towers of Kilchurn look more spectral, more gloomy, and the wooded islets stretch out and into an indefinite distance. On such a night the Pass of Brander is a weird place indeed: black shadow, touched here and there by the feeble glimmer of ice and snow among the rocks and gullies, seems to encroach half-way across the narrow arm of the loch, and the clear, cold light around one seems to be a crystallizing fact! It gives funny feelings and invites queer expressions even from the most casual minded of men.

It was after walking up the pass and by the moonlit loch that one heard the sounds of hearty voices, the clink of nailed boots on a frozen path: these were hill walkers who had stayed late in the upper corries and were now returning to quarters by the shepherd's track from the Cruachan burn. This, by the way, is the finest direct approach to the mountain. The voices spoke of plans for the morrow, of the friend who was breaking his journey as he passed out to "the islands", and a genial conspiracy to make him break faith and come along for a walk over these snow-clad hills. But remembering his Jonah-like experience of Cruachan, the "friend" determined not to fall into the trap. Next day he saw, from the steamer deck, the great white tent on the horizon, clear, brilliant, wonderful.

(d) BEN LUI

Summer Traverse—Great Snow Gully.

I once traversed Ben Lui from Dalmally in the west to Tyndrum in the east, merely because in spring I had been in a party conquering the great ice gully and reaching the summit, and perhaps some Editor desired a page or two about the place. I had a day to spare, and for a wonder the weather was clear and calm. The River Orchy was at its brightest—with golden brown currents and silver foam here and there. I remember

turning across the railway after seeing the meeting of Orchy and Lochy. Gradual was the rise toward Ben a Clee, 3008 feet. Near this point my eye was caught by a warmer red tuft lying on the sun warmed stones. It was a fox sleeping. I stepped very quietly and came within a short distance before the animal awoke, leapt to its feet and nimbly panicked over the edge of the ben. It is not often that a wanderer comes across such a thing.

From the shapely cone of Ben Lui, 3708 feet, on a clear day of winter or summer there is a perfect view. From any direction it does not seem a forbidding peak. The two peaks of Ben Cruachan are prominent in the west; the massive Ben Nevis is to the north; Ben Lomond and Ben Ime south, and Ben More, Stobinian, Ben Lawers going in a diminishing corridor to the east, with a huddled mass of tops beyond. The hills of Jura, of Mull and many another island peep over the flashing expanses of sea-lochs and outer firths to the Atlantic. In summer the landscape is green and bronze of forest, strath and heather, with light blue of sky and fainter light on the distant bens. Sea-lochs like Linnhe and Fyne, fresh-water lochs like Lomond and Awe brighten the broad moorlands, the deep glens and the narrow straits close to the sea. Here

A livelier emerald twinkles in the grass,
A purer sapphire melts into the sea.

The usual descent from Ben Lui which stands on the backbone of Scotland between the Loch Awe basin and that of distant Loch Tay, is by the left-hand ridge which drops easily to Corinish farm. There is also a steeper and rougher ascent or descent from the Glen Lochy road right opposite the mountain. My own track kept on the other side, but the right so that I might add Ben Oss to the list of "Munros" (3000 feet tops) touched. I then aimed for Corinish farm, and the track to Tyndrum. In the high corrie with nought but rock and heather, birch and straggling fir—remnant of an ancient forest on every side, the sources of the Tay are gathered.

The river is first known as the Fillan. In spring or autumn, when the bracken is of a reddish-brown colour (especially noticeable after rain), the grey of the rocks appears, by contrast, to have a delightful greenish tinge—in fact nothing can surpass the beauty of colouring to be seen in the early part of the year. The autumnal colouring is more gorgeous, and at first sight more striking, but too hot—almost overpowering. It lacks the tender delicacy of the springtime.

How tame and poor, in comparison, these places appear in this summer day. All that beautiful snow-pattern which covered the mountains, which gave them such height, such sternness is gone; the hill-sides and woods, clothed in monotonous green, have last lost much of their grandeur. The beauty and variety of colouring in the foreground is the perfection of mountain beauty. Below Corinish farm Ben More and its

twin peak Stobinian—two fine precipitous mountains—command the valley of the Fillan in most imposing fashion. Looking back to the head of the glen, we see a grand mountain of Alpine contour—sheeted in spring-time from base to summit with huge slabs of snow—the Ben Lui we have traversed. In winter, the contrasts, the elements, are more emphatic. Nature has opened her strongest tubes of colour. The mountains and moorlands are white touched with gold and silver, the sky of royal blue, the glens are deep wells of shadows, and the distant ocean a ribbon of purple.

GREAT SNOW GULLY

Ben Lui in winter garb has a charm of its own. This is the great snow gully, the conquest of which is sometimes very difficult and never easy. So late as mid-June men of the mountain craft may be found here labouring with ice-axe and Alpine line. To see this gully, Corinish, the farm on the upper water, must be passed. The tiny speck of white, opening out into a great tongue of snow set at a steep angle, beckons. Two miles nearer there is a still truer appreciation for the great buttresses bounding the gully spring into existence, and the pale blue shade on the skyline resolves itself into a snow cornice of more or less importance.

One winter we had a lively struggle with Ben Lui. The short day was past its best when Tyndrum was reached, and it was too late for an attack. As the day was clear and the calendar promised bright moonlight it was decided to walk some way in order to prospect the heights if possible, for the morrow's trial of strength. Deep snow made easy the way to the mountain farm, and we were within the folds of the great ben when the crimson clouds floating high above warned of sunset.

The east face of Lui itself was in blue shadow, but the heights to eastward flamed with the rosy alpenglow. Then the light bent upward, the hills stood white, silent, immoveable. Grey fingers of mist crept here and there, now filling a hollow, now diving into a glen, here touching a lower peak, there tracing a feathery zone along the base of some greater height—wandering slowly, indecisively, pouring over the passes between the bens, curling round the great guard-posts of the deep corries.

It was a marvellous sight indeed. But greater sights were to follow. Already the eastern sky was lighting towards moonrise, and shortly the highest snow-fields were rimmed and patched and touched with silver and black. There is no relief in shadows cast by moonlight; the great corrie beneath the cliff disappeared into a blank mass. Higher and higher came the light, the stars in the east paled a little, but the great vault above was dusted by millions of God's lamps great and small.

Hushed was the scene around. The fingers of the frost had gripped the sources of the tiny burns; there was no breeze. The deer, the foxes, the white hares were gone, and the great eagles and hawks, ravens and hooded crows were at rest. The glen above Corinish was a frozen waste,

an immensity lit up by moonlight so brilliant that one might have read, yet with every shadow of intensest black. To me it seemed that it was a dead world as the world would be before colour and warmth were created, where pearl grey was the colour of blood, and pale blue the tint of the richest fields.

Next morning Ben Lui had cast off its starkness and with genial companions the glen by Corinish was a pleasant place indeed. The rocky crest of the mountain withdrew proudly as we approached: it was as though a wary fighter had pulled back his head to present his hard fists and strong arms in defence. The fists were steep buttresses, the sturdy guard was the long steep brae toward which every eye was turned. Ben Lui reserved as a last resort his defence of snow cornices on the upper edge. Already we had passed the farthest track of last evening, and we were facing the long easy snow slopes which lead to higher and to better things. The great snow gully gives capital sport at all times, and in certain tempers and conditions is impregnable. Somehow I felt that the day's labour would not be in vain though the work promised to be arduous. The leader decided to keep straight up—if he could, and that did not ease the route. It is often worth while to deviate on to a buttress for a change in method. If the rocks are not coated with ice, speed can often be made pretty rapidly at angles where step-cutting in snow becomes both difficult and dangerous.

The ice-axe, however, snicked steadily and for a while the progress was satisfactory. Then, as the snow hardened, more blows were needed for each foothold, and each one belayed himself by turning the rope round his driven-in ice-axe. If anyone made a slip the jerk would not catch us unawares, and there remained a certainty of saving the whole party. Luckily our precaution was not tested by mishap. Even in snow-climbing, men do not altogether throw discretion to the winds. The snow was harder here and so steep that big hacks had to be made for our feet, and an additional slash for handhold was acceptable at time. Up yard by yard we forced the way, and at last passed the steep and narrow throat of the gully where the shattered buttresses come close together. Now we were in the upper basin, at an easier angle, but with a snow cornice showing its mocking lips above. It was not too comfortable to remember that steep ladder of holds by which, if defeated, we would probably have to retire. Besides, the short day was getting spent, and however impressive it is by moonlight on the Corinish moor, there are limits to its delight among the snows near the summit of the ben.

Before tackling the upper snow wall we bethought of lunch (long overdue), and sandwiches, raisins and thermosized milk were consumed in leisurely haste. The leader had apparently no misgivings about the behaviour of the cornice: had made the ascent on Ben Lui in snow-time before. So it proved when, assuming our line on the rope, he led for a slight bend in the overhang. Up, up, up, with the steady axe-strokes echoing eerily around, then a pause as he carefully cleared the soft edge

where the lower snow had slipped away from the upper. Then the axe spoke again in a different tune, and a block of snow rumbled past, another, and still another. Then, with a call to "Hold fast", he drove the pick-edge into the upper snow, hauled himself up, and in a moment was standing with one boot on the fixed weapon.

The height above was apparently too great to be conquered so the second's ice-axe was passed up, by the aid of which the leader sprawled himself forward, and disappeared in a whirl of snow fragments. But his yell gave us news of victory, and in a few minutes the whole party climbed the easy cone to the cairn marking the summit, looking westward to where the lowering sun was turning the ocean into a bath of blood, and crowning the hills with a tender glory of carmines, purples and pinks.

The return to Tyndrum was down the north-eastern face, taking the advantage of a comparatively broad shoulder, and coming in easy time down to Corinish and the village. That deep groove in Ben Lui often has climbable snow late in June, and even after the general thaw elsewhere there is often a white wisp here masking the spring of the Fillan river, which is really the source of the River Tay.

(e) HILLS AT CRIANLARICH

Two Munro Climbs—Cruach Ardran—Ben More Avalanche—A Grilling Experience.

TWO MUNRO CLIMBS

A "Munro" is a Scottish summit over 3000 feet in height—in summer weather a desirable object for the hill-walker; in snow-time often a hard nut for experienced mountaineers. And snow-time in the Highlands extends far into the summer, the great corrie on Ben Lui providing fine sport in June, while the northerly face of Ben Nevis is cut into by deep gullies which afford good snow climbing until late July or even August.

My first "Munro" in a particular year was Ben More, a peak of 3843 feet, reputed to be the most conspicuous point in Perthshire. The mountaineer's route lies parallel to the Callander and Oban railway for a couple of miles, then strikes upward at Ben More sheep farm. As we passed along Loch Dochart with its famous robber's castle on an islet, we canvassed the possible routes. The buttress in front was divided into two indefinite ridges, between which was a shallow corrie floored with snow and fringed with a few dark rocks. The decision was to hold right into the corrie, use the snow awhile, and then pass to the ridge on the right. The tramping was pretty stiff—a steep angle and an upper slope simply welling with dark-stained, snow-water. But half an hour of this brought easier

travelling on the snow, which was old and safe though inclined to softness. Above this we reached the right wall of the corrie, loose grit and grass, in easy condition owing to the prevailing wind. Our view, however, did not extend, for the clouds were low, and only Strath Fillan and Crianlarich were dully visible. Shortly, however, even this limited view was denied us. The mists swirled round, and heavy raindrops began to pelt, changing to hail of a most stinging nature.

So far my lack of an ice-axe had been of little importance, but now the crust underfoot hardened, the angle increased, and we passed into a wilderness of boulders, presumably the buttress above the corrie. How terribly they loomed and bristled through the mists, but a few steps forward ousted their churlish pretensions, and a way right or left or over presented. My friend now and again notched a welcome step on the hard snow for my assistance.

At last we cleared the pile of rocks, stepped up a slope of snow, at a gradually easing angle. At this point I felt that so strenuous an expedition was scarce good enough to a chap who had been in the train practically all night, and had not placed foot on the bens since a gentle stroll in November. However, a little persuasion had its due reward. There was a feeling of a near-by summit in the air, and I felt that the dark shadow of crags in front specially tempting to perseverance. These crags proved to be but 12 feet high; slash-slash went the ice-axe across the crusted snow, and in a score steps we were round the obstruction. In front was the cairn, draped in frozen fog, and our task was done.

Two minutes in the biting gale was sufficient, considering that the view was confined to ourselves, the cairn and a couple of snow hummocks. Then a compass course was set south for the col between Ben More and Stobinian, a V-shaped neck 1000 feet deep. The ridge was impassable (and indeed unfindable) in this gale, so our course shaped a little east of south. And here happened an incident. My axe-man in front was cautiously feeling his way down a steep place when his footing gave way, and he glissaded a few yards before the drag of his ice-axe stopped his career. At the same moment I, too, lost footing, with more sensational result. Trying to dig in my heels, I simply rolled over and went sliding, helpless, towards a fringe of rocks below which boiled and whirled the clouds. The snow on Ben More gave me a fast glissade, and I had scarcely singled a great rock fang in my way ere I was down to it. My first handhold slipped, but turning over I gripped with the other, and after an instant's tension and excitement, managed to come to a stop. Had I failed in this the consequences might have been serious. Caution, great caution, marked the remainder of our progress to the Stobinian col. Once in our descent the clouds drew aside, and showed the wedge of Ben More, 3843 feet, in front. Then the clouds ceased to pass, and in comparatively short time we had reached and crossed the summit, descended to Loch Dochart and tramped to Crianlarich.

Nowadays I mark the evening after that expedition as rather remark-

able. I was so tired that I dropped into bed without even beginning to undress. And it was daylight when I was awakened.

CRUACH ARDRAN

My second "Munro" was a different affair. Cruach Ardran, 3428 feet, was not to be assailed by the easiest route, but to succumb to an attack with ice-axe and climbing rope delivered up the great snow gully in the eastern front.

From Crianlarich we went in about a hour and a half to the foot of the cliff. A few minutes were spent discussing the course, a proposition to keep the great gully throughout being withdrawn in favour of a temptingly steep and narrow gap to the left. For a couple of hundred feet we kicked steps in the snow, then crushed into a crevice of the rocks as a hail squall tormented the mountain-side. Here we put on the rope, for the angle was steepening rapidly at the foot of the little gully. The next half-hour was a repetition, the leader's ice-axe sending down frozen chips, step after step being cautiously tried and used. Then the angle steepened again, and a proposition to the "rocks" agreed to without discussion. The position was certainly airy, and the clouds kindly veiled the great declivity into which one must pitch if one of the tiny uncertain ledges (moss, ice, soil, snow, rock in varying proportions) came away. Nor could more than shadows be seen ahead. Our progress was slow as the rope was short and halting places at wide intervals, but little by little we got up to the great outcrop, outflanked it, and reached the snows of the upper mountain.

It seemed but five minutes from our scramble through the rock-belt to the cairn crowning the mountain. There was no broad view from the mountain's crest, but a few yards over the top, toward Ben Tulachan, we had an entrancing glimpse of Loch Voil and Loch Doine, and a momentary view of Stobinian. Ben More was hidden and the other Perthshire peaks.

Now to descend. The hail pelted and stung as we turned, and there was the utmost difficulty in seeing our way at all. Every slope seemed to end in a dangerous rock-tower; but at length the right rib was found. Climbing upward with a rope about your middle is simple compared with a roped descent over broken ground, and my exertions to keep up with the leader's progress provoked comment from No. 3, who desired a more leisurely descent. However, his troubles were soon at an end, as we were unroped at the head of a long snowslope which we desired to glissade.

On Ben More we had glissaded all too gaily, but here the snow was so soft and wet that walking down would have been scarcely less swift, and only by fits and starts did we make progress. Then a long, slow lunch in the lee of a big boulder, and an easy slog over bog and moor back to the village, thoroughly satisfied with the day's labour and success.

BEN MORE AVALANCHES

Ben More of Crianlarich has an evil repute in winter—it breeds pretty extensive avalanches. These are not the rushing, roaring, dusty slides which come off the overloaded slabs and crags of big peaks, but broad-fronted, furtive marauders which come down practically in silence, and take the wanderer unawares. Many times I have read accounts of lively incidents on the treacherous eastern face of this ben. On one occasion a climber was entrapped, carried down several hundred feet and closely imprisoned because the mass around his legs compressed itself into hard, solid ice. When his companion arrived, the prisoner was busily hacking at his fetters with a pocket knife! Had the mishap occurred to one unacquainted with Scottish snow, it might have been the body and not the legs which were gripped in that stern vice. In which case discovery would probably have been delayed too long for rescue.

Some pretty step cutting can be found when the snow lies hard on Ben More, as also on its sister peak, Stobinian, but the latter is perhaps more famous for the quality and length of its glissades. One perfect day we started somewhere near the cairn and came to a halt near the Ben More burn nearly 2000 feet lower. The pace seemed to approximate that of an express train, and certainly was a delightful experience. How my face tingled with the cold; there was a perfect coating of frost rime generated during the swift run down the cold air.

There are other worthy peaks near Crianlarich, and for the ski-runner there is a wide open corrie drained by the Ardran brook, with beautiful slopes. The place has discrepancies, of course, for more than one wight has found an "eye" of water in an unsuspected place, though not everyone has had the courage to grovel through it on a thaw-day.

A GRILLING EXPERIENCE

In one summer visit the Crianlarich tops gave me a lot of provocation. In ten July days I tramped a pair of mountain boots to bits, scrambling up invisible ridges, visiting unseen heights, probing elusive corries, and wading through palpable bogs. Indeed, I remember the bogs the most. The weather was awful—ten days of sticky air, heavy gloom, and never a bit of light or glimpse of colour. I was never so unlucky before or since. The mantle of the hills, glens, watersides was not mist or cloud, but some atmospheric element which choked even the nearest tops and buttresses. Every peak, every "top" over 3000 feet (and I visited the lot) had the same grim, bilious distemper. I tried the heights at dawn, at midday, at sunset, but failed to get any clear outlook at any time. I did a midnight walk over Ben Lui beyond Tyndrum and found the watershed just as dour as the east. Finally, my boots came apart, and I had to stop the climbing over sharp stones.

At midnight I decided to change my programme by taking to pass-roads, and before dawn had walked past Tyndrum, to take the green

track over the hills to Glen Lyon. So long as the road surface was fair metal, my boots held together, but the first heather and grass track brought upper and soles apart. So most of my miles past Loch Lyon and over the hill path to Glen Lochay and Killin were barefooted. However, before the last stage of metalled road, I made a determined effort to bind together sufficient of the soles with the laces and a long thong to pass unmarked among the other walkers. Indeed, quite a pleasant young lady walked beside me from the Lochay Bridge to Killin, and was courteous enough not to make any remark.

Never in Scotland have I had such a grilling experience; at the end of it I had not written a satisfactory line. Foxes and blue hares, ptarmigan and red grouse, even the flowers were not to be seen. I have fought most sorts of weather on the heights, and defied them, but this languor and swelter was the limit. On one winter visit to Glencoe, after days of wading through thaw, snow, mist, rain, mud and sleet, my only suit of clothes collapsed. They had held out through the last stormy day, and then gave way utterly and fully. Some lady of the household spent considerable time and materials drawing enough of the soaked garments together for my train journey south. At the first large place I had to purchase a suit of readymades before I dared to go home.

It is hard to forgive Crianlarich for such a terrible grilling, for elsewhere in the Highlands conditions were no better, and the "sunshine spots" had to gloss it over in their meteorological reports. Golden eagles occasionally haunt the high passes south of Crianlarich and one great bird soared past so close that every tone and detail of its feathers, beak and talons could be seen. It was quartering the rocky ground for hare, rabbit, ptarmigan or other edible fare. In a few moments it had passed out of sight. Then another eagle came along, swerved as it watched the ground, and swept out of sight. A third bird arrived in due time—and I concluded mildly that one eagle was passing on regular patrol. But shortly three came over, practically flying in line, with their wicked eyes watching the ground.

On the north side of the Dochart river, the rocks are of different geological formation to Ben More and its satellites. They are more rounded and less rocky than the other hills, and a wonderful place for alpine flowers, both rare and common. I love to see the glens and moors and uplands covered with bloom, and in theory prefer mass colour rather than variety. The wide open alpine flowers catching the sun are wonderful indeed.

AMONG THE BENS (CONCLUDED)

MY FIRST SCOTTISH EASTER

Lawers in Snowstorm—Lost in Glen Tilt—Struggling through the Larig—Trouble in Rothiemurchus Forest.

For the first Easter week I spent in Scotland, I planned a five days' march—to begin at Killin, and to end, so far as walking was concerned, at Fort Augustus. I expected a certain amount of exertion, but did not plan anything arduous or sensational. The first day, however, gave me a tingling. As I walked from Killin down the north shore of Loch Tay, it was just the usual April weather—squalls of warm snow or cold rain, with some pauses—chill, frozen, or thawing—between. The loch was jerked into white horses as the heavy blasts rushed on, but the clouds on the hills, though travelling at great speed, never broke. The mist-line I reckoned at about 1000 feet up, and there was a queer blue glimmer which indicated that snow lay just within the veil. My instructions were to leave the road at a one-chimneyed cottage, and to slant upward towards the stream of Tom Breck. Beyond the first steep there was to be a narrow glen, at the head of which the path to Ben Lawers ridge swung steeply to the right. From the top of this ridge I was to keep to the left to the summit; and it was my intention to continue beyond until there was a clear descent to Glen Lyon.

LAWERS IN SNOWSTORM

But when within the mist I felt less secure. Even on a "Baddeley" map, the route looked a tangle, with chances of trouble among crags and cornices. There was no doubt that the Ben was thick with snow. My companion, being an ice-axe, had no vote, but was a potent influence in deciding against the Killin instructions. I must make at once for the ridge though the wind thundered above. It would be better sport wrestling with the storm than groping about a corrie choked with cloud and snow where one could never be certain of the right route. The compass fixed a line for the first peak on the ridge, and up I went. With every hundred feet there was a more vigorous resistance, yet I did not wish to lose direction by leaving the exposed buttress. The gale simply yelled, but its power did not bar progress. Really, one enjoyed the battle just as much as the white hares and ptarmigan which lobbed in and out of sight among the mist-wreaths. These creatures have far more sense than accept the quiet side of a mountain on a snow day. The white stuff simply hurls over them as they squat in the open, head to wind. On Ben Lawers they moved very tardily, and more than once the stroke of an ice-axe might have deprived either bird or beast of life. But I was on an errand no of destruction that day—and perhaps they sensed the fact.





In the scant breaks between the cloud tides I noticed that the buttress was narrowing. Hitherto I had looked left and right across continuous snow, but now there was close on either hand the wall of gloom which is eloquent of deep abysses. The altitude felt greater too. Once the upper layers of cloud rent, and there was presence of white peaks across a narrow gulf. But never did I get a glimpse outward, or down to Loch Tay. Still heavier gusts, still denser snow-clouds, still more of blizzard drift hampered my actions. I rested a minute, bending over the ice-axe for breath, and straightened up to find the last trace of foot-prints erased, buried. Looking at the compass in such circumstances is always advisable. On a similar ridge I once met a party vigorously retracing their steps. "What's it like on the top?" I asked. The leader looked askance. "We're just going there," he said. "No, you're not," I replied, and a brief argument caused the production of a compass. The other fellows had lost nearly an hour by their about-turn, and were quite out of temper at their "absurdity". On Ben Lawers there was no such mishap—just because I was on the alert.

The long ridge which culminates in the cone of Ben Lawers is a draughty place at Easter, but who would exchange the whipping snow, the choking blizzard, the thundering gale, for the finest palm-court in the world? Certainly there was no "view"; but rambling on British hills has finer attractions than a mere wild welter of land, loch, and sea. Without an ice-axe, however, that ridge would have been a doubtful proposition, but by its aid everything became simple, and it was just a question of endurance and sticking to the correct line. Great towers of snow loomed through the mist, and in a few strides were surmounted. Then came a tremendous gulf into which the snow sheered. But these were mere practical jokes on the part of the mountain—little obstacles to scare away the timorous. At long last the great peak was tackled, but I was not really sure of success until a glance backward showed part of the cairn from which the snow had fallen. The last ten minutes gave rather a curious experience. To right and left were lines of curving blue snow, and between them a soft carpet of pure white into which one sank ankle-deep. I felt that this was a road of honour specially laid for the winter visitor to the heights.

With Ben Lawers conquered and behind, I trudged heartily into the gale, which was now rising to a veritable storm. A half-hour of steady work would carry me below the worst of the mountain, and I hoped for an early arrival at Fortingall. But it was not to be. For a moment the upper mountain blew clear, and I glanced behind, above, and around. This was indeed a narrow ridge, and deep to the right was a lochan half-filled with snow. Then the clouds shut with a vicious snap, and a tremendous squall of snow and hail made the ridge seem to rock. Progress was impossible. I drove the spike of the ice-axe deep into the hard snow, and bowed to the blast. The minutes came and went, but there was no diminution in either violence or sound. The squall seemed to rise to a crescendo of fury, and I was in danger of being hurled from my grip on

M

the axe. Twice the fury rose and tested my powers to the limit. As a third squall went on, I withdrew my anchor and let the storm hustle me over the edge. It was a wild glissade, but the only way out of the difficulty, and the angle of the descent was not so steep but I could control the rush. My retreat brought me down some 1000 feet of easy slope in a few minutes, and down there, though the wind still plucked and the air was full of snow-dust, was comparative peace. Traversing above the lochan I soon found an easy descent to Lawers, and thence made my way down to Fearnan and over the pass to Fortingall.

My second day's excursion was to Blair Athol, over the top of Schiehallion. The morning was clear and bright, and I wandered sedately up by the Keltney burn. Schiehallion, though 3500 feet and more high, is an easy mountain to see and to climb. One cannot mistake its perfect pyramid nor the route up its ridge. There was a good deal of snow towards the top, but nowhere did it give trouble. By keeping to the edge, I found hard-frozen stuff, and when it came to the descent, I simply chose a line of deep, soft drift and cantered at any desired speed. My plan for the day had one serious error. I should have made directly for the head of Loch Tummel, instead of which I made across the moors to White Bridge, and then slanted down to the foot of the loch. The result was that at about seven o'clock I was whistling for the ferry opposite the Queen's View, and my map gave me no right to believe that I could trace the path across the moors to Blair Athol in the dark. So it was that I came to the old Bridge of Garry, and walked up the throat of Killiecrankie in the gloom. It was nine o'clock when I reached the Bridge of Tilt Hotel. There was much in the day's ramble to apologise for—a late start, a dawdle over the mountain, and the uncertainty which led me the long way round by the Bridge of Garry. But no! that last needs no excuse, for the gap of Killiecrankie in semi-darkness was a splendid sight.

LOST IN GLEN TILT

My third day also suffered from a late start, but I deemed it proper to wait for letters, which of course didn't arrive. The morning was quite favourable, and I enjoyed the miles of soft road up to Forest Lodge. The waterfall about half-way up the glen was in fine order. Above Forest Lodge I passed for the first time into sheer wilderness, and met a snow-storm which provided distraction for some twenty minutes. The track was, of course, running with water; the white blanket soon sank down into the grass, disappeared, and gave no more trouble. The long trough of the Tilt seemed to run like a rapier into the heart of the mountains; I knew that the dark corrie opposite led up to Loch Loch. A sort of track seemed to clamber up the ridge to the south, which the map showed as a possible route to Beinn a' Ghlo.

The suspension bridge over the Tarf was a friend in need; otherwise I would have had to tramp miles up to the ancient fords in the upper forest. Now came the amusing part of the day: *I got lost*. Of course, the

weather was to blame. A big snow-squall came sifting down the glen. One could see but a few feet ahead, and the path was broken into several independent routes. Across a savage little burn was a good path which wound steeply—just as the col of a well-conducted glen should do. On Ben Lawers, two days before, I consulted the compass at every turn. Here it was ignored, for the snow had turned to chill sleet and I was loth to let wet and cold within my raincoat. In half an hour I was high above the deep glen, enjoying the scene thoroughly. Five ribbons of water slid down from the moor, wove in and out among crags, then burst into spray which was sucked into great beds of scree. There were many deer hereabout—chiefly hinds and calves—and quite a lot of ptarmigan. Then, as I strolled calmly along the drifts, dodging the water-courses and stony places, it was suddenly carried into my mind that the next swerve of the path was far more easterly than memories of the map had led me to expect. Thereupon came an unfolding of the map, and a recognition of error. But go back to the crossing—no fear; there was a possible slant over the hills which would serve me very well, even if it did not save any time, besides which my hopes were fixed on a bed at either the Bynack shieling or at the Glen Geldie cottages, and these could not be far away. The Tilt—perhaps I should more correctly say the water which eventually becomes the Tilt—was finally crossed, just above the stream which comes down from Loch Tilt.

From this point, the going was downright nasty. The path was out of repair, and strips of snow lay in every hollow. I could never tell whether the hollow was a yard deep or merely a film of snow above some deepish pool, and the physical test of such things should always be used with caution. I trailed off here into the bog where young frogs flopped quite gaily, and out there over boulders which were often quite slippery. And here I had to consider whether it were better to leap on to a sop of wet grass, or grope round on the snow a few feet higher up. Still progress was made, and in the late afternoon I came to the Bynack level. But, though there were plenty signs of recent habitation, the cottage was closed. The bridge beyond had been sadly mishandled by the winter floods. It started well, but the last pair of supports lurched drunkenly out of perpendicular, and the sloping timber which connects with the grass-bank was entirely gone. The burn was running too deep to think of making a ford, and anyway the proposition of leaping from the bridge-end, even to a tiring man burdened with a heavy rucksack, did not seem difficult. Nor was it! At the Geldie, however, the footbridge was entirely missing—I saw its ruin about a mile down-stream—but the ripples of a shallow pool some 200 yards back showed where the stream was fordable. The Geldie cottages were vacant—had been for a year or more, I afterwards learned—so there was nothing for it but to continue tramping down the rough road towards the Linn of Dee. There was just sufficient light to see the great pool beneath the waterfall there, but when I reached Inverey the night was almost solid around. The march from Glen Geldie was not altogether

loss. Though the clouds stretched a dark canopy from Braeriach to Ben Muich Dhui, the light poured through the Larig Ghru beneath, and touched its snows into flame. And one could not dispute that the sharp black cone which outlies Cairn Toul was fitly named the Devil's Point—there was a sinister, uncomfortable look about the place. I was struck, too, by the dead sterility of this upper shelf of Deeside, along which the road wound, mile after mile, apparently level.

STRUGGLING THROUGH THE LARIG

The fourth day of the ramble involved the storming of the Larig Ghru, which I had been led to believe was no great feat in April. I was out of Inverey comparatively early, about eight o'clock, and rambled steadily along. The human element was elusive. There was a keeper in the timber near the opening of Glen Lui with whom I had a chat. He turned his telescope to the Larig and commented that it was "sair black"; but that troubled me little. Today's defeat might make tomorrow's victory, and anyway Deeside seen over the forest was a delectable place. Beyond Derry Lodge one enters into a glorious area. There is work here for a generation of artists and poets—yes, and of photographers. The twisted pines and stunted birches stand in all sorts of picturesque attitudes. They have conquered centuries of storms, of heaving wind, of rainfloods. They show the stress of a campaign which began when Britain knew nothing of civilization. The scene suggests many a romance to the receptive mind.

Beyond the Lui Beg bridge I climbed to the open moor, and there right in front was the Devil's Point of yesterday, nearer at hand, but looking sinister and hasty as ever. Then for half an hour I pushed through a shower of great white flakes, watching keenly ahead for the cairns or patches of track which were visible between the drifts. The distant world was lost. Then came clear air: the dark spike was right opposite, across narrowed Glen Dee, and cutting up behind it was a gloomy gorge down which the Geusachan was bounding. Cairn Toul was visible just ahead, but Braeriach was too steeply close to be visible. The dip of the Larig seemed but a short distance away across the snow. The next hour or so—I had brought no watch with me so my timekeeping is only approximate—was a horrid struggle. The snow lay deep in the coves, but every rib was black with broken stones. I stepped delicately on to the white mass, sounded a way across, and made a stride to the boulders. A few clinks here, and I was faced with another seam of soft white. The same tactics must have been needed ten score times before the path rose upward, and I had hopes of more and sounder snow and fewer ribs of rock.

But it was not to be. One trouble was simply exchanged for another. The sun had come out to watch my struggles and softened the snow-crust completely. My progress was reduced to wading thigh-deep through a horrible pasty mass, which reminded me of a venture off the beaten track in a Cornish clay mine. With great difficulty I reached the great boulder which is a landmark on the Larig track. This was nearly level with the

snow, and formed a splendid table for the meal which was long overdue. At Inverey I had only got scones and jam. No doubt meat was possible, but it is a long time since I abjured meat as a provision for walks over forest and mountains. The sun scorched me in genial blessing, and hat, gloves, raincoat, coat, came off in due order. This was simply glorious. The Garachory hung a line of black and silver in the snowfields opposite, and away below the Dee slid down, down, down, to the dull brown moors and the dismal grey of the glen. But it was the glory of the snow which captivated me. The rancorous Devil's Point was hidden behind the steep cliff of Cairn Toul, and from Cairn Toul the high ridge followed by the Angel's Peak, a dainty trident of snow, round to Braeriach. The afternoon light struck a glow from such snow. There were beams of silver, slabs of gold, great slopes of ivory. There were floating shadows of purple, delicate lines of pale blue, glorious mouldings of cream and grey. But king of all lights, king of all shadows, was the luminous blue which collected under the the snow cornices, the great waves of which hung over the steep slopes and threatened the corries. Compared with Braeriach, Ben Muich Dhui, facing it across the pass, was a mere wall of silver-white, backed by a sky of deep azure.

I sat a while, lunching and drinking in all this beauty, probably thinking aloud—which is a bad habit among solitary rambles—"Who can believe that the Cairngorms are dull, dreary hills bereft of all colour and relief after such a scene like this?" The position was pleasant, and one's troubles seemed few. A couple of miles of snow-wading would bring me to the top of the pass. But was the pass so desirable after all! There was a well-marked line of retirement which had more attractions. I knew exactly the amount of energy which would carry me back to Derry Lodge or to Inverey. But a change came over the day. A thin cloud drifted along Braeriach and placed itself across the path of the sun. In a few minutes the temperature had tumbled considerably, and a sift of snow-flakes came down the air. I resumed some of the cast-off garments, and after a wait decided to attempt the pass. The chill might possibly render the going easier. I tramped steadily along, and found but few places where I sank knee-deep. At last one of the Pools of Dee was reached—a tiny slab of grey water beside a low snow-cliff. There was an elequent depression in the snow further on, which I skirted with care. A cold bath up here would be far from pleasant.

At long last the cornice at the top of the Larig was faced—a menacing curl which seemed about 30 feet in height. The nature of the snow had changed for the worse—a deep layer of soft pellets was laid over the older and sounder material. To surmount that cornice was a hard task single-handed. There was far more sliding backwards than I relished, and once a pretty big fragment broke off and threatened a sudden burial. Success was only won by pulling out great chunks of the soft white and pressing them firmly underfoot until the corridor rose high enough to reach the upper snow. At least half an hour was thus employed, and by this time the

shadow of Braeriach was climbing apace up the wall-like Ben Muich Dhui. The far side of the pass was also corniced, but I selected a place next the main slope, and slipped down with only ten minutes' delay. After this I certainly expected fair going. There below was the trough of the Larig, with the Lurcher's Rock, a stubborn sentinel, on the right, and Carn Elrick, a white wall, to the left. Away beyond looked down the long snow shaft to the brown and green-blue of the larches and pines of Speyside, and further away to the moors, to the farmlands, and to the distant sea. Here and there a line of white proclaimed high ground beyond the gleaming blue of the Moray Firth.

But my immediate business was the Larig Ghru, from which winter had filched the burn. I recalled the yarn of a mountaineer, who, on such a day as this, crashed through the snow arch and provided his friends with much labour ere he was hauled again to the surface. Such a mishap would not be far from a tragedy today, so I coasted warily along the steep wall. The soft pellets, however, had other views, and again and again I slid downwards in the midst of a tiny avalanche. But after severe struggles up, alternating with rapid slides down, I won through the steepest part of the pass, and found a line of moraine hills which offered safety even if the gaps between their tops were soft. Meanwhile the glow overhead had turned to rose, and I looked back through a softening veil to the hard-won pass. But more welcome was the sight of the burn escaping from its miles of snow-tunnel, and a steep slope which promised quick release from snow and toil. The Larig path, however, swings clear of the water here, and for a mile or two there was a succession of soft drifts, mud-pools, hidden boulders, and all the wickedness a naturally bad path can muster after a winter in which torrents have been using its bed for a ploughing competition.

TROUBLE IN ROTHIEMURCHUS FOREST

The most arduous portion of the way was indubitably behind, and, although walking without much spring, I felt far from uncomfortable. Victory was at hand, and a plume of white showed the whereabouts of Aviemore station. There was, however, quite a peck of miles still to cover. The first section, the upper forest of Rothiemurchus, was really fine. The level sun-rays picked out every fold and gully, every water-course and grass-tract, and filled with a soft glow, the undergrowth of heather and bilberry, and diffused a warm light round the boles of the trees. At long last I came to the cross-roads and to the ruined stable by the pasture, and crossed the stream by a crazy footbridge. Five minutes' saunter beyond convinced me of error, for the next stream ran deep and impassable. Wherefore I returned and made a second cast which discovered the Allt na Beinne bridge. From this point I expected trouble with forest roads. Baddeley on Rothiemurchus at even-tide is an earnest and depressing document. Few may pass where many are lost in the depths. But alas! there were no forest—just a wilderness of broken branches, dead stumps,

and the wreck of a log railway. Still, Baddeley had served me well in other districts, and when I saw a dim light from a rough hut, enquiry was justly due to his memory. No; the lady could not direct me properly but her husband would be back from Aviemore in a few minutes, and would attend me down to the road with pleasure. When the "goodman" came home, however, I was pressed to a bit of supper, and a long talk about bird-life in the forest followed, so that it was after eleven o'clock before my obliging host left me on the road to Coylum Bridge.

Arriving at Aviemore, I discovered the first passenger train to the south was not due till 3 p.m. (it was Sunday), so that, as I had to be in England on Monday night at the latest, my intention of getting off at Kingussie in the early morning and making for the Corrieyarrick Pass and Fort Augustus, had to be abandoned.

THE END

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